

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

VOL. 55 No. 1

JANUARY, 1987

A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR READERS

I asked the New Year for some motto sweet—
Some rule of life with which to guide my feet:
I asked and paused; he answered sweet and low,
“God’s Will to know”.

“Will knowledge, then suffice, New Year?” I cried;
And, ere the question into silence died,
The answer came: “Nay, but remember, too,
“God’s Will to do”.

TRY, AND TRY AGAIN

Those who use R. B. Scott’s Lord’s Day Scripture Reading Cards will know that currently we are reading through the Book Of Acts. A week or two ago we reached the point where, on Paul’s first missionary journey, John Mark forsook Paul and Barnabas and returned home. This incident and its sequel are worthy, perhaps, of a closer look. It was while Paul and Barnabas sojourned with other prophets and teachers, at Antioch, that the Holy Spirit said, “Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them”. (Acts:13). Accordingly these two men set out on what is commonly referred to as ‘Paul’s First Missionary Journey’ (for other additional such journeys followed). Verse 5 (of the same chapter) mentions that they took with them John Mark.

JOHN MARK

On this journey John Mark was not regarded as an equal of Barnabas and Saul but an attendant, or serving companion. He was a family relative of Barnabas, being the son of Barnabas’ sister (Col.4:10)

John Mark’s mother was Mary, a Godly woman, whose house in Jerusalem was used by the church on certain occasions. Indeed when the apostle Peter was miraculously released from prison (during the persecution of the church by Herod) and deposited suddenly in the streets of Jerusalem, he immediately made his way to the house of Mary, “the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying,” (praying for the release of Peter). (Acts 12:12). John Mark was probably among that large number of brethren at that prayer-meeting, and thus was not only raised in a God-fearing home, but grew up in the exciting, active and dangerous days in the early years of the Lord’s church.

It is also thought, by most Bible scholarship, that John Mark was the author of *The Gospel According To Mark*, but this is not entirely certain. Notwithstanding this, there is little doubt that John Mark and his family played a prominent role in the church from the first. After this particular bout of persecution against the church halted by the divine execution of King Herod, Barnabas and Saul travelled north to Antioch and took John Mark with them, obviously thinking highly of him, and subsequently took him with them, as we saw, on Paul's First Missionary Journey. (It was also at this time, at Antioch, that Christ's disciples were, for the first time, referred to as 'Christians'.) (Acts 11:26).

THE DESERTER

When Barnabas, Saul and John Mark set out on that first journey, they made for the island of Cyprus. Barnabas and John Mark had relatives on that island and probably looked forward to visiting them. After making many converts to Christ on the island, including Sergius Paulus, the Pro-consul, they sailed north across the Mediterranean to Pamphylia (now part of Turkey) and disembarked at a little place called Perga. As soon as they arrived on the mainland John Mark would go no farther and returned forthwith to Jerusalem (probably by the first available ship). Paul and Barnabas had no option but to proceed alone, and they made for Antioch in Pisidia. This was a long (about 100 miles) and very arduous journey with constant danger. The first real danger came from the terrain: high rugged mountain ranges where sheer cliffs had to be negotiated and where rivers burst out from the base of these huge cliffs and dashed wildly down narrow ravines. The second danger came from the wild mountain-men who infested the area, and robbed any travellers who passed through unprotected. Apparently such robbers are still there even to this day. These thieves were heartless and had the habit of slitting throats before searching their victims for money. (From the outset we can see that Paul and Barnabas were not on any 'picnic' and, as we know, Paul, a few days later, was stoned 'to death' at Lystra.)

We are not told why John Mark would not continue with the journey once they had reached the Turkey mainland, and we can only guess at it. Perhaps at the beginning of the journey, the young man felt excited by the sense of travel, adventure; new places to visit; new faces to see; new friendships to make; new experiences to enjoy. As the days went by, however, perhaps his thoughts troubled him that his partners were taking him farther and farther away from base, and into very unhealthy territory in Asia. Perhaps John Mark had not bargained for this and his nerve was beginning to break; perhaps the thought of those mountain-men was beginning to freeze his heart with fear. Certainly Howson, in "Life And Epistles Of Paul" thinks that the reason was one of fear for personal safety. Paul and Barnabas evidently had the courage of lions although Paul Later (II Cor. 11:26) refers to 'perils of rivers' and 'perils of robbers', and so was conscious of what lay before them. Perhaps it was unfair to assume that John Mark would necessarily have similar courage. Some have suggested that John Mark was ill but surely Paul would not subsequently be disgusted with John Mark's retreat if the cause had been bodily illness. Some have suggested that Mark was home-sick and yearned for familiar sounds; familiar friendly faces; a comfortable bed; decent meals and to see his mother again.

THE CONSEQUENCE

Whatever John Mark's reason for deserting his colleagues it was of sufficient gravity and seriousness for Paul to resolve that he would never ever take John Mark with him again. Paul considered that Mark was blameworthy and not to be trusted. Perhaps Paul thought on the proverb, "Confidence in an unfaithful man, in time of trouble, is like a broken tooth and a foot out of joint" (Prov. 25:19). At any event he resolved that he could never again place any confidence in this young man.

Many months after their return from this First Missionary Journey, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they make a return journey to all the places they had previously visited and see how the churches were faring. Barnabas was all in favour of the idea and suggested that they again take John Mark with them. Paul was infuriated at the suggestion and there were strong words exchanged. No doubt Paul pointed out the complete lack of the proper qualities of an evangelist in John Mark (Paul was, of course, thinking of N.T. evangelists and was quite unacquainted with the modern located-pastor with well-heeled congregation and roomy manse). Barnabas, on the other hand, being John Mark's uncle, was probably slightly biased, and argued that the man was young and inexperienced and ought to be given another chance. The contention was, however, very sharp and such was the strength of feeling that each went his separate way (the Greek used gives us our word **paroxysm** and certainly denotes a 'head to head' collision). Thus Barnabas took John Mark and went off to the churches in Cyprus, whilst Paul chose a man called Silas and went back to the churches he had established in Asia. Notwithstanding this very strong disagreement **the cause of the gospel did not suffer** and between them, all the churches were duly visited; and a few more established. Nor was there any permanent rift between Paul and Barnabas. All this must have added to the state of black depression of John Mark. We can imagine how he felt when, on his arrival home, he was asked "What are you doing here?"; "I thought you were with Paul and Barnabas?"; "What has happened; why have you left them?". He no doubt imagined that brethren were pointing him out as the coward who came running home to his mother (and perhaps not just imagining it). Then, on top of all this, to be the means of separating asunder Paul and Barnabas; those two brave stalwarts who had been through so much together; John Mark must have felt very unhappy indeed as he and Barnabas set out for Cyprus.

THE RECOVERY

The first thing that strikes us about this incident is, perhaps, that sometimes even the inspired men of N.T. times could not always agree. Truly as Paul explained to those at Lystra who would have worshipped them, "We are but men of like passions unto you". I suppose it is, therefore, understandable when lesser mortals (like ourselves) disagree between ourselves; although I am quite sure that we can not excuse it by saying, "Well Paul and Barnabas disagreed seriously."

Secondly we must all, at some time or other, have felt the disgrace that John Mark felt.

We have all, at some time or other, been guilty of some action of which we are not proud, and try hard to forget. We have all, at some time or other, let the side down; let a friend down; let the church down; let the Lord down. Others have been depending upon us, and we have failed them. We have all been a source of disappointment to others. Similarly, like John Mark, we have all felt fear and have balked from the task that would require courage. We have all lacked the moral fibre to do, or say, what should have been said or what should have been done. We have all felt ashamed at our inadequacy. We have all lacked resolve and purpose. We have all been under a cloud; we have all been 'in the dog-house', spiritually speaking. We have all deserted our posts, or repudiated our responsibilities. However, the encouraging feature was that John Mark was prepared to have another attempt, with Barnabas, to be a more resolute and worthy evangelist. To have another go of it, and redeem himself from the stigma of 'deserter' or 'failure'.

The wonderful sequel to the incident is the great success John Mark made of his subsequent efforts and how he retrieved his honour and self respect. His first faltering steps were not repeated and his effective efforts as an evangelist in later years were a means of a very cordial reconciliation between himself and the apostle Paul. There was, of course, no permanent alienation between Paul and Barnabas; but it is very

gratifying to read later of the glowing terms used by Paul to describe John Mark. When in captivity in Rome, Paul could write to the Colossians and say "Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner, saluteth you, and Mark (sister's son of Barnabas) ... and Justus. These only are my fellow workers unto the Kingdom of God which have been a comfort to me". (Col. 4:10). Also, Paul in writing to Timothy, could say "Only Luke is with me: Take Mark and bring him with thee for he is profitable to me for the ministry." (2 Tim. 4:11). Thus, on being given another opportunity John Mark succeeded to Paul's unqualified satisfaction, was a 'great comfort' to him, and was 'profitable to Paul' in his ministry. And so the deserter made good and never looked back. It seems, in retrospect that Barnabas was justified in giving John Mark the benefit of the doubt; and it seems as if Paul was a bit harsh and hasty in thinking that what Mark had done once he would do again. In the end all things "turned out rather for the furtherance of the gospel". Thus, those 'under a cloud' should be allowed time and opportunity to retrieve themselves. A second, a third and even a fourth chance, must be given to all those who want to do better.

As a fresh year lies before us, shall we endeavour to put behind us all our flops and failures ("forgetting those things which are behind") and shall we, like John Mark, try to do much better in the future than we have done in the past. Each day brings a fresh opportunity, and so does a brand new year. May we all do better in 1987.

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

"Let her glean even among the sheaves." Ruth 2:15

IN TIME OF TROUBLE

"Christ is everything to the Christian in time of trouble. Who has escaped trouble? We must all stoop down and drink out of the bitter lake. The moss has no time to grow on the buckets that come up out of the heart's well, dripping with tears. Great trials are upon our track as certain as grey-hound pack on the scent of deer. From our hearts, in every direction, there are a thousand cords reaching out, binding us to loved ones, and ever and anon some of those tendrils snap. The winds that cross this sea of life are not all abaft. The clouds that cross our sky are not feathery and afar, straying like flocks of sheep in heavenly pastures, but wrathful, and sombre, and gleaming with terror; they wrap the mountains in fire, and come down braying with their thunders through every gorge. The richest fruits of blessing have a prickly shell. Life here is not lying at anchor, it is weathering a gale. It is not sleeping in a soldier's tent without arms stacked; it is a bayonet charge. We stumble over grave-stones, and we drive on with our wheel deep in the rut of graves. Trouble has wrinkled your brow and it has frosted your head. Falling in this battle of life, is there no angel of mercy to bind our wounds? Hath God made this world with so many things to hurt and none to heal? For this snake-bite of sorrow is there no herb growing by all the brooks to heal the poison? Blessed be God that in the gospel we find this antidote. Christ has bottled an ocean of tears. How many thorns He hath plucked out of human agony. Oh, he knows too well what it is to carry a cross, not to help us carry ours. He knows too well what it is to climb the mountain, not to help us up the steep. He knows too well what it is to be persecuted, not to help those who are imposed upon. He knows too well what it is to be sick, not to help those who suffer. Aye! He knows too well what it is to die, not to help us in our last extremity. Blessed Jesus, Thou knowest it all. Seeing Thy wounded side, and Thy wounded hands, and Thy wounded feet, and Thy wounded brow, we are sure Thy knowest all. Oh, when

those on whose bosom we used to breathe our sorrows are snatched from us, blessed be God, the heart of Jesus still beats; and when all other lights go out, and the world gets dark, then we see coming out from behind a cloud something so faint we hardly know what it is; but at last we descry it – star of hope, herald of the morning.”

T. De Witt Talmage.

LOVEST THOU ME? (John 21:16)

“An old Scotchwoman lay dying. The sorrowing husband sat holding her worn hand in his, and seeing she was soon to leave him, broke through his life-long Scotch reserve by saying earnestly, “Janet, if ever a woman was loved, I love you.” The weary eyelids were raised, and a radiant smile overspread the pale face as Janet replied: “I aye kenned it, John, but oh, to hear ye say it.” Jesus knew that Peter loved Him, but repeated His question, that He might hear it from his own lips. How much we often lose by not saying it!”

Dr. Whyte.

THE PURITY OF THE CHRIST

“Have you never remarked that the highest human purity is generally like a soaring alpine peak, cold and chilling? It suggests whiteness as of virgin snows, and transparency as of ice-crystals, undefiled by earthly elements; but it suggests distance. Purity may be attracted by purity, but impurity, even when coupled with penitence, is repelled; it cannot, dare not approach. There must have been something peculiar about the purity of the Christ. He moved among men freely; sat down to eat with publicans and sinners; yet His garments took as little stain as the light in passing through an impure atmosphere. And, though His very presence forbad the touch or whisper or breath of that which is defiled, the veriest outcasts of society were drawn to Him by resistless attraction, lavished tears of sorrow and kisses of love upon His feet, and broke flasks of precious ointment on His person! What a mystery! A purity beside which even the snow is no longer clean, mingled with a compassion and sympathy to which the vilest sinners run for refuge as to the downy breast of some majestic bird! There was a divine quality in that purity that reminds one of the light, so pure, so incorruptible, yet falling on the sterile sand and slimy pool to call forth fair and fragrant blooms; or of the dew falling from above to rest alike on the most wholesome and the most noxious growths, and leave everywhere its impartial benediction.”

Arthur T. Pierson.

WHAT IS PATIENCE

“A little Scotch girl being asked by her teacher, “What is patience, Jeannie? replied, “Wait a wee and dinna weary.”

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

THE DEMONIAK

READING MARK 5 1-20

Jesus came into the world to accomplish a three-fold task. To glorify His Father – to save sinners – and to destroy the works of the Devil. These three are inseparably connected. It is by destroying the works of the Devil that souls are saved and God’s Name glorified.

During His ministry Jesus made many attacks on Satan’s kingdom. This is one of them. First of all let us assess.

THE MAN’S MISERABLE CONDITION

(a) He was possessed with devils.

Under the complete influence of the destroying spirits. Satan seems to have had great and general influence about the time of the Saviour’s appearance on earth. “This is

your hour and the power of darkness.” Here we see an emblem of the misery of the sinner. We are Satan’s slaves. “Sold under sin.” He rules.

(b) He dwelt among the tombs.

He deserted the habitation of the living, and dwelt among the sepulchres of the dead. The sinner is said to “Sit in the darkness and shadow of death.” The unrenewed soul is far from the favour and enjoyment of God.

(c) He was mentally deranged.

He did not act as a rational being. When he was restored He was in his right mind, so he could not have been before. Sin is insanity – the essence of folly – denial of obvious evidences.

(d) He was in a state of utter wretchedness

Naked – homeless – wandering abroad in a state of pain and distraction. A true picture of the sinner – prodigal. “The way of the transgressors is hard.”

(e) He was his own tormentor

“He was in the mountains and the tombs crying and cutting himself with stones”. The sinner ruins his reputation – destroys his health – embitters his life – murders his soul.

(f) He was dangerous to others

Exceedingly fierce. One sinner destroyeth much good. It is sin and Satan’s influence that fills men with wrath, malice, hatred and revenge.

From whence come wars and fightings among you?

(g) No man could tame Him

They had bound with chains and with fetters, yet he had broken loose. So the sinner is beyond recovery by any device or power of men. Philosophy, legislators, civilization and education have tried and failed. The power of the Son of God alone is availing and permanent. ““Not by power or by might, but by MY SPIRIT, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

Now let us see **HIS RESTORATION**

(a) He was found by the Saviour

Jesus landed on the coast and found him in his misery.

So also Jesus landed in the world to seek and to find us.

Jesus looked upon him and considered his deliverance. So also in our case. He came into the world to save sinners.

(b) The instrumental means was the word of Jesus

He spake and said, “Come out of him, thou unclean spirit”.

What a powerful word! The deaf, the blind, the dumb, the leper, the paralytic, the dead hear and obey. The very devils tremble at His word and flee from Him. He speaks pardon and peace to the distracted.

(c) The efficient means was the divine power

The word of the Lord is powerful. He speaks and all things are done. He commands and all things stand fast. Jesus has power to forgive sins. He is able to save from the uttermost to the uttermost.

(d) The perfection of His cure

He was found **SITTING**. No longer wandering about – no longer driven about by foul spirits – but calm and composed.

So the soul that is found by Jesus. Rest, joy, peace. No longer carried about by every wind and doctrine, but standing on ther solid rock of Truth. He was found **CLOTHED**. Sensible of his shame, garments were found. We are not told where. Possibly provided by the power of Jesus.

So the soul can be clothed by the garment of righteousness provided by Jesus. The very best robe obtainable. “As many as have been baptized into Jesus Christ have put on Christ.”

He was found IN HIS RIGHT MIND. His eye, no longer wild but beaming with intelligence. His tongue, no longer raving, but speaking words of soberness. His feet had ceased to wander, he had found a resting place. His hands no longer maimed himself. It was an entire and complete change.

So God produces NEW CREATURES IN CHRIST JESUS. He erases the image of Satan and engraves the image of His dear Son.

Now let us see **THE EFFECTS PRODUCED**

(a) He desired to abide with Jesus

Perhaps from the fear of his old enemies. Very proper. The soul's safety is to be found near Jesus. Or maybe from gratitude and with love for the one who has saved him from so great a death.

Jesus bids him to go home to his friends and **TELL THEM** how great things the Lord has done.

(b) He was obedient to Jesus

His will was lost in the will of his master. With joy and gladness he went forth and published abroad the deliverance of Jesus.

Redeemed souls are asked to testify to the saving grace and redeeming power of the one who has called them out of darkness into light; from the power of Satan to God.

APPLICATION

Here we see a true picture of the state of the sinner.

Here we see the willingness and ability of Jesus

Here we see the duty of those who have been saved.

Tom Kemp,
Hindley.

BE STILL

(Psalm 46)

The tendency of many today is hurry, hurry, hurry. It would seem that we have lost something of the past when times moved at a more leisurely pace. Patience, calmness and unhurriedness are things of the past. The bible does not say much about hurrying, but it certainly mentions the theme of being calm, being still.

"Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

In Psalm 46, there is much we might be taught! "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble". We have to believe and realise that these words of scripture must be continually words of our own. In this, we can look squarely at the world and know we have safety in the Lord. In his writing the Psalmist obviously realised the overwhelming presence and power of God. Having God is of the ultimate importance. To know him and to be with him requires patience and calmness. "Be still and know that I am God". It is only when we are quiet that we hear God speak to us.

Sometimes we hear so many other voices telling us what to do that we can not hear God. If we are to succeed in life, we certainly need to hear God's voice and signals, giving direction and guidance. Be still, keep quiet, be calm, in soul and mind. Let it happen: be overcome with the spirit. Be fully absorbed in Him. We need in these times to be drinking more often at the spiritual rivers. Too often we merely gargle and rush on. Brethren it takes time, to take time, so take it! Psalm 4:4 "Stand in awe and sin not. Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still". In other words take time to be holy. Practice the art of being still and paradoxically lead a more active life in Christ Jesus. We must unwind and be at peace with self and God. If we are too busy to pray, then indeed we are too busy. If you want to be busy though, be busy for the Lord. **Make the time, and take the time, to be with the Lord, and live a full life in His blessings.**

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
 Abide in Him always, and feed on His word;
 Make friends of God's children; help those who are weak;
 Forgetting, in nothing, His blessing to seek.

A. P. Sharp, Newtongrange.

BLESSED BY AFFLICTIONS

I once read the story of a farmer's mule that fell into a dry well. The farmer, after a number of unsuccessful attempts to rescue him, ordered his boys to bury the mule alive. But he refused to be buried. As each shovel of dirt was thrown into the well, the mule simply trampled the dirt under foot. Finally, the well, was filled with dirt, and the mule walked away unharmed from his prison. That which was intended to bury him became the means of his salvation ... **blessed by afflictions.**

A person strong in faith can see his afflictions turned into blessings. Paul besought the Lord three times to remove his thorn in the flesh, but the Lord assured him that "strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Joseph was the victim of his brother's mistreatment, Potiphar's wife's lie, and subsequent imprisonment, but God was working through these afflictions to richly bless Joseph and to preserve for him and his brethren a posterity in the earth (Gen. 45:7). The same God works today in turning afflictions into blessings.

But beware of self-pity, for self-pity can rob one of the blessings that can come through afflictions. What a difference between Jacob, who "refused to be comforted" (Gen. 37:35) after Joseph's disappearance, thus surrendering to self-pity, and David, who, "washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped" (2 Sam. 12:20) after the death of his baby! What a tremendous attitude David displays, the one who wrote, "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." (Psalm 27:14).

The following words by William Cowper have helped many in seeking for blessings in afflictions. We place them here, hoping they will be of help to our readers.

'TIS MY HAPPINESS BELOW

'Tis my happiness below,
 Not to live without the cross;
 But the Saviour's pow'r to know,
 Sanctifying ev'ry loss.

Trials must and will befall;
 But, with humble faith, to see
 Love inscribed upon them, all –
 This is happiness to me.

Trials make the promise sweet;
 Trials give new life to prayer;
 Trials bring me to His feet,
 Lay me low, and keep me there.

Aliens may escape the rod,
 Sunk in earthly, vain delight;
 But the true-born child of God
 Must not, would not, if he might.

Bill Hall.

THE CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF DEATH

Though death is still an enemy, yet to the believer it is not nearly so formidable as to the unbeliever. It still breaks through every barrier that medical science can set up and snatches our loved ones away from us. But we know that those who are saved are "with Christ; which is far better." When death strikes, we need all the comfort we can find in the Scriptures and in the writing of skilful expositors who have thought much about our last enemy in the light of the Word. Therefore those who are not familiar with them may some day be glad to have the following comments on death, taken from Matthew Henry's very full and helpful exposition of the raising of Lazarus: "Those whom Christ is pleased to own as *His* friends, all *His* disciples should take for *theirs*. Christ speaks of Lazarus as their common friend; *Our friend*. Death itself does not break the bond of friendship between Christ and a believer. Lazarus is dead, and yet he is still *our friend*. He calls the death of a believer a *sleep*; *he sleepeth*. It is good to call death by such names and titles as will help to make it more *familiar* and less *formidable* to us. The death of Lazarus was in a peculiar sense a *sleep*, as that of Jairus's daughter, because *they were* to be raised again *speedily*; and since we are sure to *rise again at last*, why should that make any great difference? And why should not the believing hope of that resurrection to eternal life, make it as easy to us to put off the body and die, as it is to put off our clothes and go to sleep? A good Christian, when he *dies*, does but *sleep*; he *rests* from the labours of the day past, and is refreshing himself for the next morning. Nay, herein *death* has the advantage of *sleep*, that sleep is only the *parenthesis*, but death is the *period* of our cares and toils. The soul does not sleep, but becomes more active; but the body sleeps without any toss, without any terror; not distempered nor disturbed. The grave to the wicked is a prison, and its graveclothes are the shackles of a criminal reserved for execution, but to the godly it is a bed, and all its bands are the soft and downy fetters of an easy, quiet sleep. Though the body *corrupt*, it will rise in the morning as if it never saw corruption; it is putting off our clothes to be mended and trimmed up for the coronation-day, to which we must rise. See Isaiah 57:2; 1 Thess. 4:14. The Greeks called their burying-places *dormitories*." So then, though we are called to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and even more than the shadow, death itself, we can still say, "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me ... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psalm 23:4,6).

S.S. Times.

DYNAMIC POWER OF THE BIBLE

One illustration out of many that could be given, to show the Bible changes men, comes from the Second World War. This story, authentic, comes from the pen of Clarence Hall, Executive Editor of *Christian Herald*. The title of his evangelistic story is *What I found at Shimmabuke*. After reading it, I'm sure you will be impressed as I have been, concerning the converting, dynamic power of the Bible Dr. Hall states:

"I can never think of the boons and benefits the Bible invariably brings without thinking of Shimmabuke, a tiny village I came upon when, as a war correspondent, I followed on the heels of our troops beating out their tough and bloody victory on Okinawa.

"It was an obscure little community of only a few hundred native Okinawans. Thirty years before, an American missionary on his way to Japan stopped here. He hadn't stayed long — just long enough to make a couple of converts, leave them a Bible and then pass on.

"One of the converts was Shosei Kina, the other was his brother, Mojon. From the time of the missionary's visit, mind you, they had seen no other missionary, had

no contact with any other Christian person or group. But in those 30 years Shosei Kina and his brother Mojon had made that Bible come alive! Picking their way through its pages, they had found not only an inspiring Person on whom to pattern a life, but sound precepts on which to base a society.

"Aflame with their discovery, they taught the other villagers until every person in Shimmabuke was a Christian! Shosei Kina became head man in the village; his brother Mojon the chief teacher. In Mojon's school the Bible was read daily. To Shosei Kina's village government, its precepts were law. Under the impact of this Book pagan things had fallen away. In their place during these 30 years there had developed a Christian relationship at its purest.

"Then after 30 years came the American army storming across the island. Little Shimmabuke was directly in their path and took severe shelling. When our advance patrols swept up to the village compound, the GIs, guns levelled, stopped dead in their tracks as two little old men stepped forth bowed low and began to speak.

"An interpreter explained the old men were welcoming them as fellow Christians. They remembered their missionary had come from America. So, though these Americans seemed to approach things a little differently than had the missionary, the two old men were overjoyed to see them.

"The GIs' reaction was typical. Flabbergasted, they sent for the chaplain. He came and with him officers of the Intelligence Service. They toured the village and were astounded at what they saw – the spotlessly clean homes and streets, the poise and gentility of Shimmabuke. They had seen many other villages on Okinawa – villages of unbelievable poverty and ignorance and filth. Against these, Shimmabuke shone like a diamond in a dung-hill.

"Shosei Kina and his brother Mojon observed the American's amazement and took it for disappointment. They bowed humbly and said: 'We are sorry if we seem a backward people. We have, honoured sirs, tried our best to follow the Bible and live like Jesus. Perhaps, if you will show us how ... (Show them ?).

"I strolled through Shimmabuke one day with a tough old Army sergeant. As we walked, he turned to me and whispered hoarsely, 'I can't figure it, fellow – this kind of people coming out of only a Bible and a couple of old guys who wanted to live like Jesus! Then he added what was to me an infinitely penetrating observation: 'Maybe we've been using the wrong kind of weapons to make the world over!'"

– Selected



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"In view of the widespread concern about the disease AIDS, should the Church have a teaching programme about this?"

I have had this question by me for some time and I have pondered as to the advisability of answering it. However, I have reached the conclusion that it is a fit subject for discussion and teaching; if only to re-state our fundamental beliefs in the sanctity of the Christian life.

Let me say immediately that I have no professional medical knowledge and on that basis I would not presume to discuss that aspect of the problem, but I **do** have some knowledge of **spiritual** matters and I shall state my views quite clearly from that

which I know; if I enter the realm of personal opinion then please feel free to disagree, rebuke, or criticise, provided that all is done in love.

First Considerations

Let me say unhesitatingly that if this disease is spread – as is confidently affirmed by those who should know – by sexual promiscuity then I would not expect that members of Churches of Christ would be transmitters of it, for the simple reason that I would not expect Christians to be promiscuous in their sexual relationships. This would be particularly true of Churches in small communities where the influx of new members is small or non-existent, and where the members know each other well.

However, without casting any aspersions, the situation in some city Churches where the personnel turnover may be quite high, relatively speaking, could be quite different. By that I mean that the disease could have been contracted **before** a person responded to the Gospel and became a Christian. It ought to be quite plain to us that the Gospel is not just for those who may be socially and sexually well-adjusted, but it is for **all**, “whosoever will may come”. On that basis I think we can well understand that the person who might be referred to as ‘the deepest-dyed sinner’, with all of the implications of that hackneyed phrase, could well become a member of the Christian community in any given locality. If such a person was unmarried, and was subsequently married ‘in the Church’, then I suppose there could be a problem; the resolution of such a problem would demand love, compassion, tact, and understanding, in addition to courage.

What am I saying? Stop preaching the Gospel? No, that would be unthinkable. But I am trying to alert Christians to the possibilities which may exist so that we shall try to ‘open windows’ so that if we do have to grapple with the problem we shall at least know how we ought to proceed. This is where a teaching programme could be useful. It is useless to bury our heads in the sand and pretend that the world’s ills can not affect us.

Scriptural Evidence

In the first chapter of his letter to Rome, Paul paints a lurid picture of debased morals relative to the age in which he lived. The mark of that debasement according to Paul was that “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful” (v.21). Very much like now, I would say. He then goes on to state a principle which is well attested to in the Bible, “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections”(v.26). It was ever so and, I am afraid, it will ever be so. God, if blatantly rejected, will give people over to that they want to persist in. This in no way nullifies His love for them, but it does indicate quite clearly that He recognises the fact that individuals and nations have a God-given right to control their own destinies; if they choose perdition, so be it. (See v.28).

It is here that Paul underlines the bottom line in debased morality; “For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion (lust) for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving **in their own persons** the due penalty for their error” (verses 26, 27). Homosexuality, lesbianism, sexual perversion; is this grim picture being seen again in the world of today?

I wonder what the penalty was which such people received ‘in their own persons’? Could it be that they experienced such a disease as is sweeping our world at present? Is it feasible to think that such a disease could have lain dormant until the world’s moral condition was such as to revive it? Nature, as well as the law, has a way of repaying that which is due according to our errors; you will no doubt recall that one of the malefactors who was crucified with the Lord said to his companion “For we receive the due reward of our deeds”. What if nature is seeing to it that mankind is receiving the due reward for its deeds?

There has always been an overwhelming case for accepting the Christian doctrine, and that case has been strengthened a thousand-fold by present events. Can any sane person conceive of a world without God? People look around at the world and see the sin, degradation, and erosion of the human spirit and say, "What is Good doing"?, as if God were some malevolent ogre applauding the handiwork of Satan. What they should be asking is, "What is **man** doing to **himself** under the promptings of Satan. Let us put the blame firmly where it belongs, and let Christians speak out clearly and convincingly against this God-bashing by people who themselves are languishing in sin. We should be asking people if they really want to live in a world without God, and be groping in the darkness of unrestrained animal impulses.

What Should We Teach?

We should be stressing at all times the purity of life; as God and His Christ are pure, so must their followers be pure in mind and in deed. We should be alerting our young people particularly to the dangers of drugs, and warning them against those insidious whisperings which say, "Its alright, have a good time, experiment with sex, pay no attention to the do-gooders".. We should be stressing the dangers inherent in the ever-proliferating sexual scenes shown on television, and warning against the filth which is contained in some books and magazines. We should be teaching the positive side of our new life, namely, that the body is the temple wherein dwells the Holy Spirit, and that we should want to keep it clean and wholesome, a place fit for Him to dwell in.

In addition to this, we should be pointing the people of the world to the Book wherein is revealed the wrath of God against all unrighteousness and sinfulness, and telling them how God has always warned of the consequences of such actions. Let it be seen that we care. Let us be vigilant in the days that lie ahead, and by God's help let us keep the Church pure in the midst of the morass of sin. For His sake, and for our well-being.

(All questions, please to:

Alf Marsden, 20 Costessy Way, Winstanley, Wigan WN3 6ES.)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Feb. 1	Jer.13:1-19	Acts 21:1-19
Feb. 8	Num.67:1-21	Acts 21:20-40
Feb. 15	Iassiah 6	Acts 22:1-21
Feb. 22	Jer. 6:1-21	Acts 22:22-23:11

HISTORICAL PLACES

I have just read **The Book of Mormon**. It mentions such places in the New World as Zarahemla, Bountiful, Lehi, Kishkumen, Gimginno, Ammonihah and Nephi. There is no historical or archaeological evidence to support their existence. (Read, for example, **The Mormon Papers** by Harry L. Ropp and **Archaeology and the Book of Mormon** by Jerald and Sandra Tanner.) What a difference when it comes to the Bible! Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Phoenicia, Cyp-

rus, Syria, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea and Jerusalem were, and are, real places in the world.

Archaeology is a genuine science. Its importance is now beyond dispute. Indeed, it is a vital branch of general Biblical research. Archaeology has corroborated the substantial historicity of the Biblical record from the patriarchal period to the apostolic age. Its sources are material objects in the ruined towns, graves, and inscriptions of people. The items that speak are the ruined buildings with their walls and rooms and floors, the pottery, the metal implements and tools, the weapons, the ivory work, the glass, coins, jewelry, the inscribed and written materials whether stone, bone, or clay. Dear reader, take a Bible Dictionary and see what modern excavations have revealed about some of the aforementioned historical places.

THE NAZARITE VOW

There were rumours (about Paul among the Jews). "And they are informed of you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after their customs" (21:21). How could such views be counteracted? The answer was for Paul to join with four men who had taken a vow and "thus show decisively that he did not intend to undervalue or disparage the laws of Moses when these laws were understood as mere ceremonial observances" (Albert Barnes). This he did, but to no avail. The incident over Trophimus put paid to the elders' plans.

I am reminded of what Paul once wrote to the Corinthians: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:19-22). Note: the saving of others was Paul's goal. Brethren, is it our goal too?

PAUL: THE ROMAN CITIZEN

This is a subject which has always drawn my attention. It stems from a general interest in the Roman Empire. I pay tribute here to Ed Archer of Lanark, whose evening classes on Roman history I have frequently attended. Ed is quite simply a walking encyclopaedia on anything Roman. I truly cannot recall him ever using a note in class.

We have often discussed Roman Citizenship. The discussions led me to more detailed reading. One book was A. N. Sherwin-White's: **Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament**. In it, he wrote: "To speculate how and

when the family of Paul acquired the citizenship is a fruitless task, though lack of evidence has not deterred the ingenious." Interestingly, he went on to say: "The 'great sum' which Lysias paid was not the price of freedom. It was the bribe given to the intermediaries in the imperial secretariat or the provincial administration who put his name on the list of candidates for enfranchisement."

A question I have often asked myself about Roman citizenship is: "How did a man prove his claim?" As F. F. Bruce has pointed out: "In the absence of any provision for verification on the spot, it must have been tempting for a man in a tight corner to make the claim even when he had no title to it, and hope to get away with it. Certainly, it was a capital offence to claim, falsely to be a Roman citizen, but how was the official before whom the claim was made to know whether the claim, was true or not?"

A new citizen would possess a witnessed copy of his certificate of citizenship. This could be produced. But Paul was not a new citizen. In his case, he might exhibit a diptych, a pair of folding tablets, containing a certified copy of his birth registration. Surely, I hear you say, that could get easily lost. Yes, indeed; but, for examination purposes, a copy or copies would be kept secure somewhere perhaps in the family archives.

PAUL AND THE HIGH PRIEST

Paul was charged with an offence against Jewish law and, therefore, the Sanhedrin was the proper body to deal with the matter. The president of the Sanhedrin at this time was the notorious Ananias, son of Nedebeaus. Acts 23:5 has caused a lot of comment. "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest" might mean "I did not think that a man who behaved so illegally (as to order him to be struck across the mouth) could possibly be the high priest."

Josephus, the Jewish historian, speaks of the corruption associated with Ananias. Ananias was murdered by zealots in A.D. 66.

PAUL: THE PHARISEE

Paul was brought up a Pharisee. The name literally means "separated one". The roots of the Pharisees went back to the movement of the Hasidim, who with the Maccabees opposed attempts to introduce Greek elements into Jewish culture in the second century B.C. Edwin Yamauchi has written "Unlike the Essenes, who looked for a kingdom of the new age, the Pharisees were willing to make compromises in order to survive as a distinct group ... As the Pharisees firmly believed in the resurrection, they clashed with the Sadducees ... The Sadducees were mainly priests, concerned with the temple worship practices; the Pharisees were primarily scribes, who interpreted the Scriptures according to the oral law, which they held was as ancient as the written law."

Paul was of the old school of Hillel. This Jewish teacher of the first century B.C. was much admired. His grandson was Gamaliel 1, also known as Gamaliel the Elder of Hazaken. He was one of the most prominent and respected teachers of the law of his day (30-60 A.D.) and occupied a leading position in the Sanhedrin, the highest court of Jerusalem. Paul was "brought up at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3).

It is interesting to read of the Pharisees from a Jewish point of view. One Jewish book I possess praises them for bringing Judaism closer to the Jewish home. It also speaks of their representing the finest traditions of their people and of human morals. (But read Jesus's condemnation in Matthew 23.)

Paul later wrote to the Philippians: "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Philippians 3:4-6 N.I.V.) He immediately went on to write: "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ."

Brethren, if a dyed-in-the-wool Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus could be brought to Christ, then anyone can be led to the Master. Anyone!

Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slamannan District, Scotland: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting took place at Dennyloanhead on December, 6th when a goodly number gathered to discuss the question "Are there degrees of punishment and reward - based upon Paul's statement that 'he that sows sparingly shall reap sparingly' and on Christ's statement that it 'would be more tolerable for Sodom & Gomorrah on the day of Judgement' than for you". Brother Jack Nisbet was in the chair and the speakers were to have been bro. W. Black from Dalmellington, and bro. Moncrieff, Haddington. Bro. Black was indisposed however and so bro. Moncrieff was the only speaker. The good wishes of the gathering towards Br. Black and his recovery, were however, recorded. Once general discussion began it was discovered by the meeting that there was a great deal more to the question that was, at first, thought and a wide range of interesting sidelights on the matter were raised. At the end of the day it was regarded as being one of the more interesting and absorbing meetings in the series. For future meetings the Chairman expressed the hope that more of the younger members would participate as speakers.

The next meeting, God willing, will be at Wallacestone (or Dalmellington) on 7th March (or 21st) and will be chaired by bro. Graham Pearson when the subject will be "Divorce & Remarriage". The speakers are to be bro. John Kneller and bro. David Chalmers.

H. Davidson (Sec.)

Peterhead, Scotland: Just a short report of the news from Peterhead congregation during 1986. March Sister Doris Buchan had to be put into a Home to

be cared for as she was getting a little muddled at times. During May 3-5 we had our annual social week-end which was hectic and draining but great and fulfilling. May 18-25 Bro. Joe Nisbet was with us which did the congregation a power of good and was greatly appreciated by all the Brethren. On June 24th Sister Margaret Thompson fell asleep thereby receiving sweet relief from the pain she was suffering towards the end. July 13th saw us rejoicing as Mabel Sinclair obeyed the gospel. Sept. 7th we were thankful again as Margaret Parker obeyed our Lord. Margaret is the granddaughter of our late Sister Maggie Falconer. Sept. 21st Lorraine Ricthie was immersed. Lorraine is a niece of Bro. Jocky Ricthie. Oct. 18th Andrew Beagrie became a Christian having come up through our Bible School. Oct. 19th We were rejoicing with Bro. Peter & Sister Margaret Buchan when their daughter Miriam was baptised. Oct. 19th also was the date when Elsie Troup came back into our fellowship from a long absence, Elsie is the mother of Sister Ella Brown. Oct. 12-15 We had the priviledge of having bro. Alister Ferrie with us for a Mission the results of which encouraged both Brethren and visitors. Sad to say during the year 6 people removed themselves from our fellowship and we had to remove one.

W. M. Strachan. (Secretary).

OBITUARIES

Ilkeston (Adam Street)

The church is saddened by the death, on 27th November, of brother Dan Booth yet we rejoice in his victory. He has completed his course, remaining faithful and steadfast to the end that he might receive a crown of righteousness.

"Danny", as he was perhaps best known, was born to a new life in the Lord in 1919 and was in membership with the church at Burns Street, Ilkeston, for most of his life. There he gave sterling service as Treasurer and was Superintendent of the Sunday School.

For the past 13 years he worshipped at Adam Street, where he continued to work and give encouraging support to every effort made to serve the Lord. He will be missed for many things, including his ready laugh and his willingness to render practical help. For these things he was well known outside the church also.

Funeral services, conducted by Frank Worgan (Corby), were attended by his family along with representatives from several churches, and the Good Templars, of which he was also a staunch supporter.

J. Diggle, (Secretary).

Hindley

The sorrows of this life have come upon us in the passing to a higher life of our dearly loved Brother Edward Walter Wellings. Although living alone after the death of his wife he was able to carry on. On October 12th on calling to pick him up to go to the meeting he was found collapsed on his bed unable to move, and was taken to Astley hospital on the Wednesday following, where he remained until 3rd of December, when he died, in the early hours of the morning. The funeral and thanksgiving service was on the following Tuesday, conducted by Brother John Morgan, whom Teddy had looked upon as his own son (having no children of their own.)

He worked for over 50 years in the mine. When he was caretaker of the meeting house, he often went very early in the morning to stoke the old coke boiler; this is unknown to-day with our modern heating.

He was not a platform man, but he dearly loved his little Bethel, often joining in the mutual ministry by giving out a favourite hymn, which he read with deep feeling. Many will have shared in his hospitality, particularly at the Hindley Bible School; and many speakers were taken for refreshment before making the homeward journey.

He very rarely complained, he al-

ways said, "I'm champion," when asked how he was. We rejoice in the one who is able to "call the sleeping dead to rise," that without pain or suffering he simply "fell asleep in Jesus;" and that we His brethren were enabled to help and care for him in his lonely years.

"They who sail on the ocean of life with Jesus, find a safe harbour at last."

Tom Kemp.

VISITING PRISONS

I received a most interesting letter the other day from brother Jimmy Parr from Manchester. Our brother will not mind me quoting from it: it is certainly worth quoting:- "I was baptised into Christ in January 1962, after spending almost 16 years of my life locked away in prison. I deserved what I got and I don't blame anyone but myself. My reason in writing this letter is to ask why there seems to be no one in the church who visits people in prison. (I, myself, would not be allowed to do this work because of my prison record). Anyone (who truly represents the church), elder etc. interested in this ministry should write to the Governor of any prison and will almost certainly be allowed to carry out visits. I know, from personal experience, that such would be not only a blessing to the prisoners but also to those visiting. When we do visit a prisoner we should **not** ask him why he is there, but allow him to tell us if he wishes to. I

have been in the following prisons: Liverpool: Manchester: Leeds: Preston: Lincoln: Leicester: Cardiff: Wormwood Scrubs, London: Featherston and H.M. Borstal when I was 18 years of age. I owe a great deal to one of God's servants, or should I say two - brother and sister Ashurst.

(Editor)

Amalgamation

Wigan (Albert Street & Longshoot)

After much prayerful thought and discussion the brethren of the assemblies at Albert Street and Longshoot have agreed that with effect from the beginning of January 1987 the two assemblies will unite, and will be known as the church at Longshoot, Wigan.

There has been a feeling for some time that the cause of Christ in Wigan would benefit if our forces and resources were combined, and we look forward to a future in which the Saviour will be presented to the people of Wigan by a strong and united body of Christians.

The church will meet in the more modern building at Longshoot, but its work will be to evangelise the whole of Wigan. The brethren wish to emphasise that, far from being a sign of decline, this move represents a mature and far-sighted decision to ensure the continuity and success of the Lord's work in this area for the foreseeable future. Please pray for us as we strive to glorify the name of Jesus.

Andrew Marsden & D. Melling.

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER YEAR — POST PAID BY SURFACE MAIL

UNITED KINGDOM and COMMONWEALTH	£ 5.50
CANADA & U.S.A.	\$10.00
AIR MAIL please add £1.50 or \$3.00 to above surface mail rates	

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY
Telephone: Longniddry (0875) 53212 to whom change of address should be sent.

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Scotland EH37 5PT. Telephone: Ford 320 527

"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by
Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar, East Lothian. Tel: (0368) 63785