

# THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

*Editor*

EDWARD MALCOLM

15 Bridge Street • Knighton • Powys • LD7 1BT

edward@revmalcolm.freemove.co.uk

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## *Editorial*

### *Abram and Lot*

NO ONE who reads the story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, but notes that there are characteristics in common, like the leaving of their homelands, opposition of relatives, and the temptation to go Egypt-ward out of the land of promise and there to live a lie. There are other characteristics shared by some: attempted seductions, barren wives who quarrel, younger sons who inherit the blessing, and brides met at wells. Further, children are promised, as is the land and God's blessing, which Gentiles acknowledge. All are buried in the cave at Machpelah.

The repetitions in Scripture are emphatic and deliberate. There is a choosing out of certain facts to lay before us. God means us to note certain matters because they concern us, or will one day. Human propensities do not change, and neither does God, nor His Word. See all this, yet see that there is development from generation to generation. How sophisticated the family becomes. Such families, one notes, still behave just as they always did, the veneer of cultural advance changing nothing, except that the further they get from the ancestor who truly walked with God, the worse they behave. God "retires" as civilization advances. God speaks and comes personally to humble, tented Abraham, calling him "my friend"; less directly to Jacob; whilst only by the mediated blessing of his rough old father, to polished Joseph.

The other factor in common in the history of the chosen family is contention. Husbands and wives favour different sons; brothers strive, starting with Lot going his own way to the extreme edge of God's promised land, and ending with brethren selling their brother into slavery. "A brother offended is harder to be

won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle" – see Jacob and Esau.

Surely, like begets like, and Lot's action influences the generations yet to come. Surely, what one does, is increasingly visited on the family in the wisdom of God. It grows and grows, to the eventual ruin of Judah and Israel in Rehoboam. Genesis is the book of bitter beginnings, a letting of the genii out of the bottle.

Yet two of the wronged parties, Abram and Joseph, forgive, and God chooses their company, preferring both as types of the supremely forgiving Christ-to-come. Blessing lies in the barren hills with God, where the covenant is renewed, leading to the perfect covenant in Christ long years later. And in the dungeon in Egypt, where forgiving Joseph, his reputation sullied, points far ahead to another Joseph, apparently wronged by Mary, faced with a choice. He must either "make her a public example", or leave people to believe he is the hard-hearted father of the child unborn and to "put her away privily". It is then that the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph, and the full healing of God's Christ comes into our world, breaking down the middle wall of partition. Reputation isn't worth defending.

May this genesis of love in Abram be our spiritual inheritance.



## Aged Daniel's Numbers

THE EDITOR

*"Blessed is he that waiteth" (Daniel 12:12)*

DANIEL is perhaps ninety years old, yet intact in wisdom, wonderfully holy and mature. He has lived through terrible troubles, and been shown in vision worse evils than even he has experienced lying ahead. His people, far from returning to sit every man under his fig tree and under his vine in Jerusalem and Judah, are to face every sort of trouble. Their future is so dark that Daniel feels physically sick for them after each vision. The worst vision is the last in the eleventh chapter, with its forces of evil from North and South invading his people and the abomination of desolation wiping out God's truth. It wrings from his heart an admission and a question.

I believe many older Christians, contemplating their own children, whether by faith or by blood, tremble. They see ahead only the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not. Listen to God's answer to all whose hearts tremble for the ark of God, every Abram who at night sits watching the smoking furnace pass between the pieces of the carcasses, oppressed by an horror of a great darkness. Do you not hear the Word? "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a

stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years. . . . And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace. . . . But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again.”

Daniel’s admission, with emphasis on the first word is, “I heard, but I understood not”. With every fibre of his being he has heard the word. He means that he finds the words easy, but the content of them a complete enigma. That is our admission too! I once read that George Müller told Spurgeon that he liked to read his Bible though time after time, and he liked especially reading those parts that he could not understand. You think that odd? But Muller said it is like a little lad who loves to be with his father and as the father talks, he does not really understand. However, as the days go by, the meaningless words and ideas begin to take shape. Thus he learns much, which he would not have learned if he had run off.

The words Daniel heard were truly obscure, worryingly so. Wisely, Daniel restricts his enquiry to just one thing. He has received many dark statements: kings from north and south battling, intriguing, being politically correct whilst lying through their teeth, and trampling over the Glorious land, God’s people, and bitterest of all, their gods defeating God’s truth. He asks but one thing, “O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?”.

Christian, let this be your one question as your heart feels sick for the future. The great Queen Elizabeth returned the Spanish king “an answer answerless”. And by persisting in that she saved this nation. God replies, “Go thy way, Daniel”. The question was an urgent one, and God had raised it in his servant. So God has raised many questions in your heart to trouble you. Yet all the reply He vouchsafes to you is “Go your way, leave the matter alone!”.

God refuses to answer for His Sovereign ways, but He reasons. Yes, God reasons with us, answerless. It is that the words of the vision are “closed up”, meaning not only to Daniel, but that they are secure from destruction. The Word of God is preserved, man cannot destroy it, even though rulers have tried from time immemorial. And “sealed till the time of the end” like as if put into a library where its words will be available in the future, exactly when needed.

God’s silence is to deny curiosity, but to be practical and useful, revealing that “Many shall be purified and made white and tried”. Holiness, purity and burning up of our dross, is the meaning of the words as far as we are concerned. He adds, “but none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand”. Through troubles ahead, this is my object says the Lord, to separate between my holy people and the wicked. Ask no more, Daniel, for I will say no more in plain words.

Our Lord Jesus never spoke without parables, so as to keep out those who should not understand, whilst revealing simple truths to those God intended to teach. Now from this chapter of Daniel especially our Lord drew His words when sitting opposite the temple speaking of things to come in Matthew 24. The words here are hidden in meaning, “but the wise shall understand”. Come, take courage and use your reason as God directs.

One man said of the numbers of “a thousand, two hundred and ninety days”, and “the thousand, three hundred and five and thirty days”, that the last “leaves everyone guessing”. Many explanations are offered. We shall have to wait until the end, after the fulfilment, to understand perfectly. But without guesswork, the meaning is plain and simple now – “Blessed is he that waiteth”. Grasp that, and the numbers are understood as one, the 45-day difference only reinforcing the message.

There are various meanings possible, all of which point to this simple meaning. Each of these have the merit that they approximate to a fulfilment.

One fulfilment possible is the wicked Antiochus Epiphanes who is connected in Daniel 11:31 to “the abomination that maketh desolate”. He overcame the Jews and sacrificed a pig on God’s altar and persecuted the holy people amongst the Jews, until overthrown by Judas Maccabbeus who cleansed the temple and reinstated the daily sacrifice. The triumphing of that wicked was approximately the same as “a time, times and an half” of 12:7 which is in turn taken as the same as half the last “week” (literally “seven”) of the seventy sevens of 7:26. In other words, half of the perfect number seven. However, this calculation leaves 30 days spare. And is based on the unprovable presumption that one time + two times + half a time equals three and a half days. They then bring in the “two thousand three hundred days” (literally “evening mornings”) of 8:13. By taking each day as one evening-morning, in other words dividing by two, they arrive at 1,150 days. This is approximately the time Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated everything. However, it is 4 months short of accuracy. Also the verse before us never states when the period in question begins, so who can know the precise time it ends? As for the 45 days spare, they take that to be the time between Antiochus’ overthrow and death. Again, the weakness is that we do not know the time of his death.

The same sort of scheme can also make the 1,290 days approximate to the three and a half years we believe our Lord’s earthly ministry suffered the oppression of the devil and the contradiction of sinners against Himself. The 45 days approximate to the time He was on earth from His resurrection to ascension.

A third way of interpreting these days is approximating them to the period of the siege of Jerusalem, the oblation ceasing in the temple after about 1,290 days of siege, and the final overthrow of the city 45 days later. Again, the numbers do not work out at all exactly.

Others take each day as a year (something which defies final proof), and say the 1,290 years approximate to the Babylonian captivity of the Church under the Roman Pontiffs from the 4th to the 16th centuries, bringing 7:25 into this calculation. This is the woman (Church) in the wilderness of Revelation 12:14. Some take the end of the period as Wycliffe and Huss, other as Luther’s time. What then of the 45? This is taken as 450 years of partial papal oppression, until the Church worldwide flourishes in the mid-nineteenth century.

Other schemes exist, all pointing ahead to a complete fulfilment, when Antichrist shall rule. This is the period we have to wait and suffer, and it is spelt

out in days so as to comfort us. God has not left the period to chance, but has it exactly measured for His Church and people. Our Lord's use of all this is in Matthew 24, where in verse 13 He says, "but he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved"; and in verse 22, "except those days should be shortened there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened"; whilst in verse 46 He seems to echo Daniel again in saying, "blessed is that servant whom the Lord when he cometh shall find so doing".

Let us take our verse literally – *O the blessings on the one who waits*. Do not just have the patience of the saints for 1,290 days, but when heart and flesh fail and our eyes with looking upward, when it seems impossible to hang on another day, then set your mind to it that God has added another month and a half, or another 45 days' oppression, and it is in that extra patience that the real blessing lies. Daniel was told that in his nineties, so may each grey-haired saint, deeply troubled that "truth is fallen in the street", that "they are not valiant for the truth" any more, find in it the strength he needs to face today.

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## For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

### TRUE HAPPINESS

WHAT is it to be truly happy or blessed? If we listen to some people we will be told many different answers – a successful job, good exam results, a nice house, good looks. But what does Jesus tell us about true happiness or blessedness?

One of the answers he gives is: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). To be poor in spirit means to realise your own unworthiness and to trust completely in God. "Without me ye can do nothing," Jesus tells his followers at another time. To be poor in spirit is to know that inability and to think nothing of ourselves.

King Jehoshaphat of Judah knew about being poor in spirit. He was a wealthy king with a huge army. When the armies of Moab, Ammon and others came to fight with Judah, Jehoshaphat confessed that he was powerless against the enemy. "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee" (2 Chronicles 20:12), he said. God reassured him, "The battle is not yours but God's. Stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you."

Jehoshaphat appointed a choir of singers to praise the Lord, as they walked out before the army. "Praise the Lord, for his mercy endures for ever," they sang. The

enemies of Jehoshaphat destroyed each other – none escaped. Jehoshaphat's poverty of spirit resulted in a great victory for the people of God. They were rewarded with large amounts of spoil from the defeated armies – including precious jewels.

Those who are poor in spirit have a great reward too – “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are given a crown of life (Revelation 2:10) which will never fade away. They are given the beautiful robes of Christ's righteousness which have no stain of sin. The believer is also given a throne – “to him that overcometh will I also grant to sit with me in my throne,” says Jesus to his followers – those who are poor in spirit. What a wonderful provision to look forward to in heaven.

### BIBLE SEARCH

Find the missing words in the verses. The initial letters of the correct answers will spell out the subject of the story.

1. For your sakes he (Jesus) became poor that ye through his \_\_\_\_\_ might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).
2. To him that \_\_\_\_\_ will I grant to sit with me in my throne (Revelation 3:21).
3. By the \_\_\_\_\_ of one shall many be made righteous (Romans 5:19).
4. I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to \_\_\_\_\_ the spirit of the humble (Isaiah 57:15).
5. Now unto the King eternal, \_\_\_\_\_, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever (1 Timothy 1:17).
6. A great multitude, which no man could number, of all \_\_\_\_\_ and kindreds and people and tongues stood before the throne and before the Lamb (Revelation 7:9).
7. The \_\_\_\_\_ of God are a broken spirit (Psalm 51:17).
8. Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the \_\_\_\_\_ (Proverbs 16:19).
9. Now unto the King eternal, immortal \_\_\_\_\_, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever (1 Timothy 1:17).
10. But ye are a chosen generation, a \_\_\_\_\_ priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people (1 Peter 2:9).

11. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my father, \_\_\_\_\_ the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34).
12. But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and \_\_\_\_\_ at my word (Isaiah 66:2).



## The Assurance of Salvation

The Rev. H. A. LEWTY, M.A. (T.C.D.)

*One time Vicar of Tushingham*

THERE comes a time in the lives of those with whom the Holy Spirit has been dealing when they say: "O, that I could be sure that I was one of God's children. I feel something of the drawing power of the Gospel. I see something of the beauty of Jesus Christ, but I wish I could be certain of my soul's salvation."

God's school-children must always commence in the lowest form. Thomas Scott, the commentator, says: "Suspect any religion that has little to say about repentance." Most men would like to feel sure of their future happiness, but the old Adam has no desire for, and can see no necessity for, repentance. When the gift of repentance is bestowed on a poor sinner, however, a wondrous change takes place. Jesus was exalted not only to give remission of sins, but to give repentance also, and there is no repentance worth the name unless He gives it. The first thing that comes to anyone who has been taught to repent by the Holy Ghost is the knowledge that he is a sinner. The first thing that man is sure about is, not that he is saved, but that he is a sinner and needs a Saviour.

Let us ask three questions concerning assurance, and see if we can find answers to them in our own hearts: (i) What is biblical assurance? (ii) How can it be obtained? (iii) If it is given to us, what difference will it make in our lives?

### *(i) What is Scriptural assurance?*

It is one of God's great, deep mysteries, and, like all God's deep mysteries, it can be stated in simple language. Here it is in a verse from the most ancient book in the Word of God: "When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" (Job 34:29). The soul that is still struggling and striving, the soul that is longing but still unsatisfied, that soul knows no quietness. It is in a stormy sea, with the waves tossing about and the winds blowing, in darkness, with nothing to hold on to, and no joy and no peace. But assurance means peace. When Jesus came to the