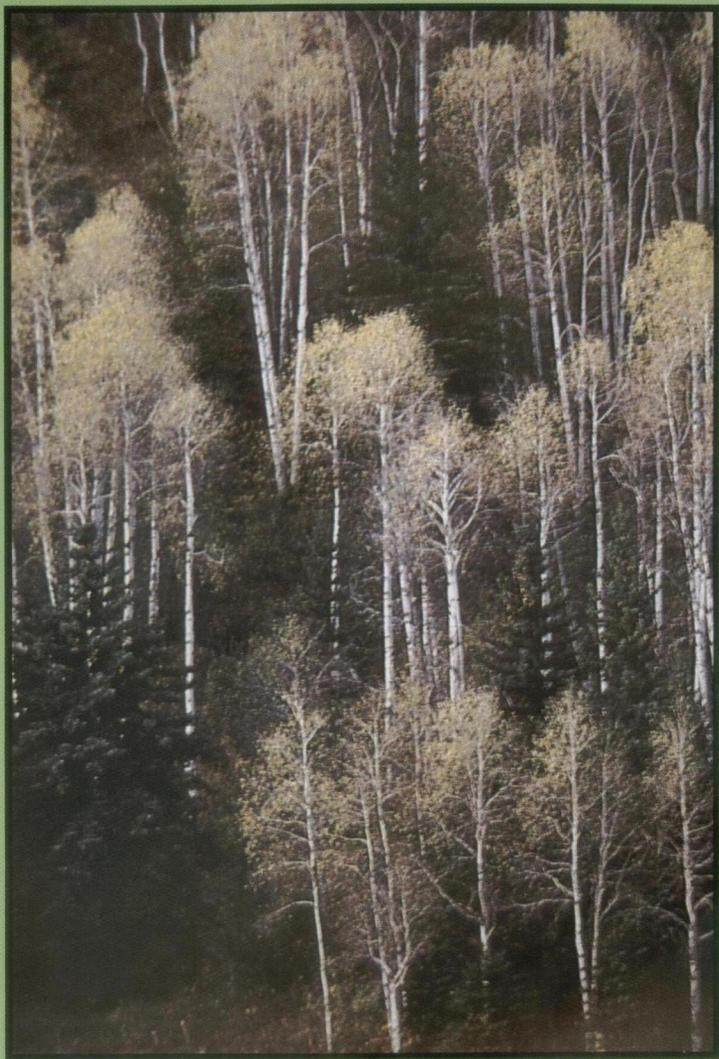
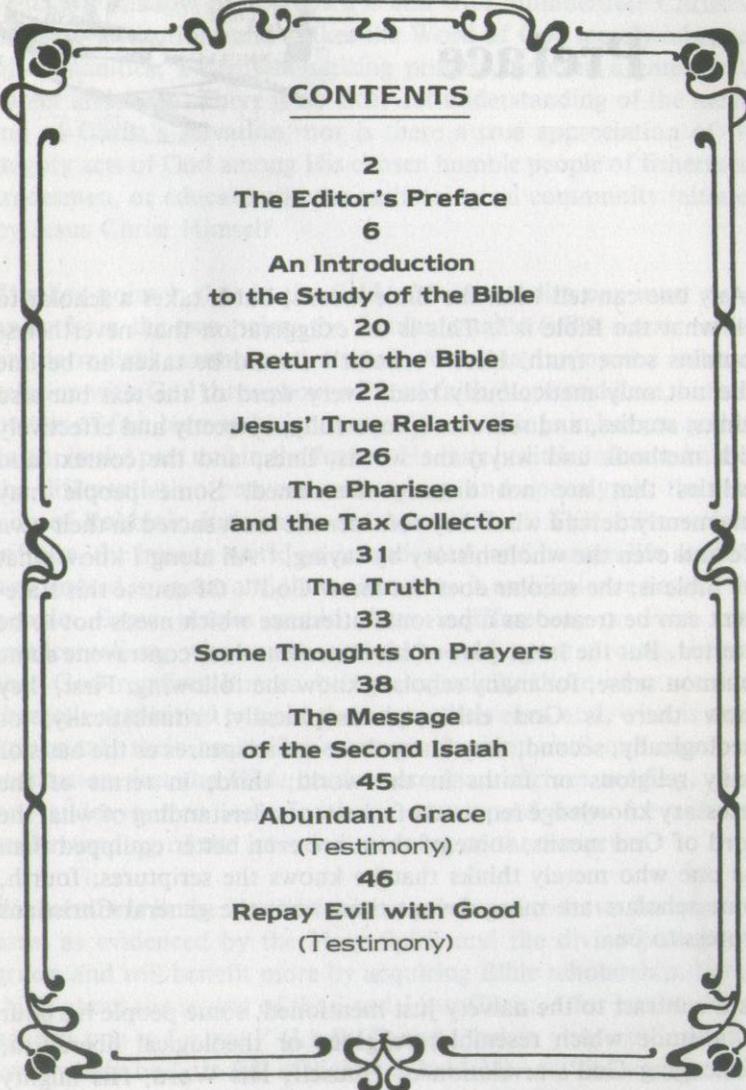


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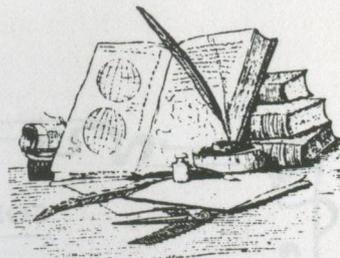
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The Editor's Preface



“Any one can tell what the Bible means, but it takes a scholar to tell what the Bible is”. This is an exaggeration that nevertheless contains some truth. Here “scholar” should be taken to be one who not only meticulously reads every word of the text but also thinks, studies, and searches (prayerfully, correctly and effectively with methods and ways) the words, lines, and the context and realities that are not directly mentioned. Some people may vehemently defend what they consider the most sacred in their own life and even the whole history by saying, “All along I know what the Bible is; the scholar does not know God”. Of course this statement can be treated as a personal utterance which needs not to be attested. But the latter part of his statement does contravene some common sense, for many scholars know the following: First, they know there is God either philosophically, ritualistically, or theologically; second, they know there are scriptures as the basis of many religions or faiths in the world; third, in terms of the necessary knowledge required of a better understanding of what the word of God means, some of them are even better equipped than the one who merely thinks that he knows the scriptures; fourth, some scholars are more devout than what the general Christians profess to be.

As a contrast to the naivety just mentioned, some people harbour an attitude which resembles religious or theological liberalism, challenging God's revelation of Himself, His Word, His mighty acts — in fact, God Himself. One remembers that Dynamic Monarchism, a theory that elevates Jesus but denies His full deity, started with Theodotus of Byzantium of the second century and Paul of

Samosata, bishop of Antioch, ca. 260 A.D., surfaced with the Soci-nians during the Reformation, and reaches down to contemporary times through theologians among the Protestants and Catholics as well. The shadow of liberalism is cast over innumerable Christian learning institutions and makes the Word of God merely a branch of humanities, a demythologizing process, or even a gateway to career and fame. There is no clear-cut understanding of the meaning of Christ's salvation, nor is there a true appreciation of the mighty acts of God among His chosen humble people of fishermen, tradesmen, or educators in the eschatological community initiated by Jesus Christ Himself.

The key point is that in the field of Bible studies one must move away from the two poles: the fundamentalist (ultra-conservative) or the radical manner and attitude. One may enjoy the intimate relation with God throughout a life of faith, hope and love, but as a matter of fact he may be ignorant of many things in heaven and on earth, in the past and in the future. He may be little informed about the differentiation between eschatology and apocalypse, the relation of Rabbinic Judaism to the Apostle Paul. This universe is so infinite, the human world so complicated, and human life so short and limited in space and time, that there is ambivalence among the people. Some people would show indifference, or even anti-intellectualism, whereas the others would spontaneously intuit that God requires human beings, especially those who consider themselves spiritual to open their eyes, their ears, and, what is more important, their heart like a receptacle. Not until one comes to realization that the Bible needs more than surface reading, does one endeavour to look for some means and ways for a better understanding of the intended meaning of the Scripture.

We members in the Lord's fold are privileged to have the spiritual asset as evidenced by the Holy Spirit and the divine power and grace, and will benefit more by acquiring Bible scholarship. Let us think about the saying of the Lord Jesus Christ, “for he that is not against you is for you” (Lk 9:50) and “when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light” (Lk 11:34). All the scriptures in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek languages would remain obscure or incomprehensible to us if there had been no scribes (i.e., copiers and annotators), translators, and/or commentators. Whether directly

or indirectly, we are indebted to the great faith and assiduity of the men and women in the past. Our Bible knowledge or the way to approach the Bible world would be rudimentary, if we did not have various branches of learning: arts, history, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, and others. Without the support of any of these disciplines, our Christian life and Bible knowledge would be in a "closed chamber". With the help of a concordance or some preachers' guide, a preacher picks up some key words and delivers a spiritually edifying message to the congregation on the pews. The minister of God rightly emphasizes the importance of receiving the Holy Spirit and love in a Christian life. His exhortation is sound and valid, just as the five doctrines of salvation are indispensable. Nevertheless, in addition to the Gospel of Salvation, the historical and theological background of the Biblical text or even the learning of languages and literature is highly recommendable for an enriched cultural life. The writer of Hebrews has sagaciously encouraged his readers to progress from the elementary doctrine of Christ to maturity (Heb 6:1; Eph 4:13, 14). This applies to our life of faith today. We mature by the grace of God not only in moral and spiritual character and in the work of evangelical outreach, but also in the knowledge of His word and His divine will.

* * * * *

This issue of MANNA has as its theme "An Introduction to the Study of the Bible". It endeavours to present to the reader some of the essential aspects of Bible study as a discipline. Usually, Biblical studies consist of 1) the Study of the Canon: The meaning, criteria, and historical process of how the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) have been canonized; 2) Textual criticism: a complicated subject dealing with the Old and New Testament material such as the ancient manuscripts, Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, Coptic, or Latin versions, the role of scribes, the history and relationship of texts, and comparison of readings, in order to find out a reading which is closest to the original text (none of the original copies of the Old and New Testament is in existence); 3) Historical criticism: a study of the authorship, social setting, and historical circumstances in which the text came into being. It also ascertains whether a document refers to particular events as having happened and looks into the intention of the author, how he got the infor-

mation, his treatment of the original happening, how he would have been understood by his first readers, and how the literary form or style reflects certain characteristics of a given place and time, etc. 4) Literary criticism: a linguistic study of lexicon (word), syntax (sentence structure or component relation in a given passage), and literary analysis, to determine the meaning of the given text. 5) Biblical theology: a study of God, humanity, covenant, history of crisis and hope, and other theological aspects of the Old and New Testament.

It is understood that the foregoing scope of Bible studies is laborious, because Bible studies require time, skill, patience, and what is more, divine guidance. It is not an engagement for members who are not given the environment or opportunity to better themselves, or who do not have the propensity or gifts. As long as they worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, and keep themselves in the love and grace of God, their faith is precious in the sight of God. As for those who commit themselves to Bible studies, it should be remembered that they must constantly pray, morally and spiritually grow, and render a selfless, effective service of the Lord to ensue a dynamic life of a true believer in the Holy Spirit and the divine word. If they know only the philological, historical, and theological aspects of the Bible, but are lacking in the Holy Spirit and the necessary moral and spiritual qualities, their learning is merely worldly scholarship. Their wisdom and knowledge cannot please God, for the wisdom and wealth cannot save an ungodly person. It is thus imperative for every member of this church to achieve a dynamic and balanced life of spiritual power, love, integrity, and knowledge (2 Pet 3:18; Col 1:9-11; Hos 4:6). □

December 1986
Heidelberg, W. Germany

The Editor



An Introduction to the Study of the Bible: An Exegetical Method

Meishi Tsai

What is exegesis? It is a thorough, analytical study of a biblical passage in order to arrive at an adequate and valid interpretation of it. Natural intuitive skills are helpful, but there is no substitute for the work of careful, firsthand research. It would be much easier and simpler to approach the devotional passages or the unequivocal teachings about the way of salvation given by the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles, because they only require a capability to read and understand the intended meaning of the given passages, plus a faithful response in action (Lk 24:47-49; Jn 3:3-7; Ac 2:38-39; Tit 3:5; Ac 26:18; Mt 7:21-26; Lk 11:28). For those who want to receive encouragement, the poetical and wisdom books would be useful for meditation and emotional purgation. But when one comes to a biblical passage which requires a search into its historical and theological perspectives, he needs good discipline. From time to time self-conceitedness and confusion derive from either ignorance or a lack of exegetical training. As a theological task but not a mystical one, exegesis demands some basic rules and standards. An exegete must understand at least three basic disciplines: the historical, the literary, and the theological. All are technical and all have skills, methods, and approaches of their own.

* * * * *

Before our close reading of the text, it is helpful to see how the text has come to us as the result of a historical process. As a part of the history of the use and influence of the scripture involved, the textual history unfolds within the life of the religion or church which uses that scripture. We need a sound knowledge of the scripts, versions, and their unique nature of the OT and NT material in the historical process of transmission. Our first task is to compare the

many different versions of the biblical books which the chances of history and the labours of archaeologists have delivered up to us.

With the help of external evidence, a critic hopes to go behind the Bible and relate people or events to what is recorded in the Bible, and vice versa. To test the historical accuracy of what purports to be historical narrative, critics use such raw material as records, archives, inscriptions, artefacts, monuments, and buildings that have survived from the period. Immense archaeological skills are required to locate, uncover, clean, preserve and piece together fragments of a scroll either written in hieroglyphs (i.e. each word or syllable is represented by an object drawn in a simple way) or cuneiform (word or syllable written on wet clay tablets with a tool, the head of which is shaped like a long, thin triangle), before even the reading and translating begins. The ancient documents in the archaeological finds, if verified, would greatly enhance our understanding and appreciation of the biblical events.

Our first example is the Moabite Stone, which was found in 1868 and is now in the Louvre, Paris, records how Mesha, king of Moab freed himself by a great victory from Israelite oppression around 830 B.C. This is certainly the same war described in 2 Kings 3 in which the coalition of Israel, Judah and Edom trounced the Moabites and Mesha was reduced to offering his heir as a sacrifice. From the Moabite Stone we infer that Mesha did not wish to record his own defeats and the OT omits reference to Mesha's victory. Meanwhile, the power of Omri, Ahab's father, is confirmed.

Another example: the Elephantine Papyri which were discovered at the beginning of the 20th century, record how the Jewish colony at an island in the Nile near Aswan, Upper Egypt, around the fifth century B.C. made a letter of appeal to the Persian governor of Judah for help in rebuilding the temple of Yahweh which had been damaged. Peculiarly enough, the Jews there seemed unaware of a grievous sin they had committed (presumably resulting from a mixing with the pagan culture and a great distance in time and space from their home of ancestors). Inside their temple built for Yahu (= Yahweh), Yahu had a consort, Anath-Bethel. Like other ancient papyri, this papyrus helps us identify the Jews in one of the Diaspora areas outside Palestine after the destruction of Israel by

Assyrians in 721 B.C. or after the Babylonian Captivity in the sixth century B.C.

* * * * *

Now we come to the textual analysis, which comprises the literary and theological aspects of Bible studies. Some questions must be asked when we come to the meaning of the text as a book.

- * What were the historical circumstances and when did the book come into being?
- * Under what precise circumstances was it composed?
- * Who is the author?
- * Did the book make use of previously existing materials?
- * Has the book undergone editing or other changes in transmission?
- * In what language was the book written?
- * What is its literary style?
- * Is it prophecy, psalmody, apocalyptic, or another literary type?
- * To what audience was the book addressed?
- * What purpose was it supposed to fulfil?
- * On what occasions and under what conditions was it to be read?
- * What is the application to our present-day spiritual need?

First. Be familiar with the entire text by reading, if possible, through different language texts such as Chinese Bible, RSV, the third edition of THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT published by the United Bible Societies (1975) or the 26th edition of Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by K. and B. Aland (1979), Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* (3rd ed) or *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977). Check the correspondence of text and translation. Provide a finished translation and single out the necessary and sufficient information.

Second. Identify the historical background and social setting. Here some reading on the history and society of the Israelite religion or the early church and its cultural environment is needed.

Example: a Delphian inscription and the writings of the classical Latin men of letters (Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, Pliny's *Natural*

History, Tacitus's *Annals*) help the historians determine the event of Acts 18 where Gallio the proconsul of Achaia is mentioned. Notably, the Delphian inscription contains a proclamation made by the Roman Emperor Claudius (41-54 A.D., Acts 11:28; 18:2) between the end of 51 and August 52. It seems probable that Gallio (who was born in Cordova and came with his father to Rome in the reign of Tiberius) was appointed to this proconsulship in July 51. This date is one of the determining factors for the scholars to chart the chronology of Paul's missionary activities. The historically-minded Bible students would be amazed at the impressive examples of Luke's accuracy in the titles of the various officials in the Roman Empire mentioned throughout the Acts. These examples include the proconsul (Acts 13:7. This may be the Lucius Sergius Paullus referred to in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*), "the magistrates", a Greek term for the supreme magistrates in any city (Ac 16:19-20), "politarchs"¹ (found in some nineteen inscriptions from the second century B.C. to the third century A.D. being used in the majority of these for magistrates in Macedonian cities. In Thessalonica there were five or six politarchs) in Acts 17:6, 19, the venerable Athenian court at the Areopagus or Hill of Ares, west of the Apropolis, which had supreme authority in religious matters and to appoint public lecturers and exercise some control over them in the interest of the public order, the "Asiarchs", the foremost men of the cities of Asia, from whose ranks were drawn the annually elected high priest of the cult of Rome and the Emperor (Ac 19:31), and the "town clerk", or executive officers who published the decrees of the Demos (Ac 19:35). These various titles have been supported by confirmatory evidence from inscriptions and ancient writings.

Third. With the help of a concordance or lexicon, examine and elucidate key terms. Be sure to grasp the intended meaning of the words in the passage.

Example: The scope and seriousness of sin in the Book of Lamentations. A study of the word of sin leads to a deeper understanding of the divine view of sin which goes beyond our limited concept of mortal or venial sin. It is instead related to what the Lord Jesus

¹ Politarchs: City rulers.

Christ states in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:12; Lk 11:4) or the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt 18:21ff) about sin as transgression, trespass, or debt. Several terms (in Hebrew) in Lamentations are used to describe sin:

1) Pasha, "transgression, infringement, or rebellion", emphasizes that our deeds or activities go against the Lord's Commandments or the ethical norms (Lam 1:5, 14, 22; 3:42).

2) het, "failure or falling short" (cf. Rom 3:23) is a sin of not fulfilling a divine or ethical principle (Lam 1:8; 3:39; 4:6, 13, 11; 5:7, 16). Failure to honour parents, to keep the sabbath, or to do good while you have the opportunity belongs to this category of sin or indebtedness to God and men.

3) awon, "distortion, crookedness, or straying" is a sin from the content of the law of God (Lam 2:14; 4:6, 13, 22; 5:7; cf. preaching "another" Gospel in Gal 1:6-9 and "tamper" the word of God in 2 Cor 4:2). Balaam's sin, in addition to his covetousness, is one of the examples of distorting or straying from the right course of God's word in OT (Num 22-24).

4) marah, "haughtiness, obstinacy, refractoriness or rebellion" is also a great sin before the Lord (Lam 1:18, 20; 3:42). The chosen people perished in the wilderness simply because they were hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:12-19).

5) tume'ah, "uncleanness" (Lam 1:9; 4:15) refers not only ceremonial uncleanness, but also the guilt in the conscience (Heb 12:14; 1 Tim 1:5, cf. Ps 24:5-6).

Fourth. Analyze the literary form and structure of the passage. Is it part of a story or a literary grouping that has a discernible beginning, middle, and end? Is it a prophetic oracle, an apocalyptic, a narrative, a saying, a poem, a parable or a historical document? What is the literary pattern (repetition, contrast, chiasmus², or progression)? Are there any peculiar stylistic features?

² Chiasmus: A "placing crosswise" of words in a sentence or themes in a unit of composition. In rhetoric it refers to an inversion of the order of words or phrases which are repeated or subsequently referred in the sentence.

Example: Overstatement in Jesus' teaching is a figure of speech to overstate a truth in such a way that the resulting exaggeration forcefully conveys the point Jesus Christ was making.

In Luke 14:26 Jesus was not teaching that his followers should hate their parents, wives, husbands, children, brothers etc. The Greek *miseo* means "hate", "persecute in hatred", "abhor", but in the Lucan context Jesus used this word to indicate "more love to Him" and "less love to one's own", when the Kingdom and the earthly relationship are put side by side. The word "hate" is an overstatement and if it were to be taken literally, it would certainly contradict the ethical principle in Jesus' teaching about love.

In Matthew 5:29-30 Jesus Christ was talking about self-mutilation (plucking out the eyes) in overstatement. In order to rid one of the lust, the mere mutilation does not solve the problem. It is the heart which motivates the lust. Thus by stating the plucking of the eyes Jesus meant the elimination of the vile thoughts from the mind, heart, and the spirit (Mt 5:28, cf. Prov 4:23-27).

In Matthew 5:38-42 the statement that the disciples must turn their left cheek for those who strike them on the right cheek does not mean that a passive and naive looking disciple always shows such an action in its literal sense. In the same passage is the teaching about the giving of the tunic (Greek: *chiton*) in addition to that of the outer garment (Greek: *himation*). Since the normal dress in the time of Jesus consisted of a tunic (or called a coat in Mt 5:40) and an outer garment (called a cloak), the removing of the cloak and the tunic would result in nudity. By overstatement Jesus is teaching pacificism (tolerance, endurance, and peace). The disciples must not resist one who is evil but be willing to endure insult and contempt for the Lord and the Gospel.

Akin to the use of overstatement is that of hyperbole. This is even a greater use of exaggeration than a simple overstatement. In Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees and Scribes (Mt 23), the religious leaders are said to have strained out a gnat but swallowed a camel (Mt 23:24). Of course, one can never swallow a camel. By the use of hyperbole Jesus Christ startled His hearers into recognition of unfamiliar truth. Another of Jesus' remark is "it is easier for a camel

to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mk 10:25). Literalists may want to suggest that the needle's eye was the name for a low gate, like the door into the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, or that a camel was a kind of rope. But the Semitic bravura of Jesus' speech indicates a profound teaching in its non-literal level.

Fifth. Analyze such significant grammatical issues as the syntactical structure in sentences or clauses. Is it consistent in other grammatical points (number, case, gender, tense)? Are there any antecedents, isolated phrases, ellipsis, or other special grammatical features that relate to interpretation?

Syntax is from the Greek *suntassein*, "to arrange or place in order together". In grammatical study, syntax is a study of relationships, especially of words within a sentence. The connotations of tense, voice, mode, case, etc. are all of vital importance at this point. Take 1 Cor 3:9 for instance, "For we are God's fellow workers." Even though it makes sense in the interpretation that Christians and God are colabourers, it is not what Paul intends to say in this verse. The word "God" is used here in the genitive case (*theou*), not in the associative-instrumental (*theoi*). The genitive is intended to show possession in this verse. In the framework of the argument presented by Paul here, instead of claiming rights, Christians as coworkers of God should remember that they belong to God.

Sixth. Go into the Biblical context by relating the passage to the message of both its immediate and its wider context. This is achieved by

- (1) summarizing the passage's central point(s), essential characteristics, unmistakable implications of this passage;
- (2) analyzing the use of the passage elsewhere in the Bible and also How and Why it is quoted or alluded to.

Example: The Book of Lamentations, a 226-line poetic composition written in the acrostic form (i.e., each line begins with the appropriate letter of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet). A careful study in the language of the book, one finds that the writer adopts the

funeral song by which the Hebrews as well as all Semitic peoples honoured or mourned their dead. Certain features of the past glory of the dead (or in Lamentations, of the destroyed Jerusalem) are emphasized: his physical excellence (Lam 4:7; Is 52:14; 53:2), his riches and luxuries (Lam 4:5; Ezk 27:3ff), his esteemed position (2 Sam 1:21-22; Ezk 32:27), and irreparability and incomparability of the dead (2 Sam 1:19; Is 14:10; Ezk 27:32)

Another feature of the funeral song is a mourning of the sad state of the present: the inevitability of the fate of death (in Lamentations, the inevitable ruin of the holy city) (Amos 5:2; Ezk 19:9, 14; Jer 9:21), the transience of the dead and the incomprehensibility of death (2 Sam 1:19; 3:33-34), the abandonment and defenselessness of the survivors (Lam 1:1), the manner of death, especially if unnatural (2 Sam 3:33-34, Jer 38:22; Lam 1:19-20; 2:11, 21; 4:5), and the malicious joy and laughter of the victor or the enemy (2 Sam 1:20), and so on.

Seventh. Come to terms with the theological aspects of the passage. Does it have potential relevance for any classical conceptions of God, humanity, covenant, sin, judgement, salvation, theodicy³, eschatology, the church, apocalyptic vision of history and the Kingdom? Are there any concerns, problems, difficulties in the divine-human encounter?

For the most part the authors of the New Testament wrote with some definite purpose in view. At times they would openly declare their theological purpose (e.g. Lk 1:1-4; Jn 20:31; Col 2:2-4; 1 Tim 1:3ff; 1 Jn 2:1, 7, 12; 5:13). One must notice the emphasis placed on various books: "righteousness" and "judgement" in Matthew, "eternal life" in John or "love" and "truth" in 1 John. Sometimes the reader must read the book in relation to the message of crisis and hope, judgement and salvation in the prophetic tradition.

Let us once again take the Book of Lamentations as an example of a serious theological reflection on suffering and doom. It reveals a deep sense of spiritual desolation as a result of desertion by God and men. The motif of the past glory and the present misery and

³ Theodicy: The problem of the justice of God.

degeneration is effectively conveyed for a definite theological purpose; why does the nation (destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C.) suffer more than ever immediately after Josiah's reform? The fall of Jerusalem was indeed a clarion call to the entire re-assessment of the national faith. Why should the covenant people and the sacred city of Jerusalem confront catastrophe? The Book of Lamentations points out the problem of suffering (another splendid book on this subject is Job) and that suffering is related to sin. The language vividly describes the tragic reversal of the one-time populous and honoured Zion (comparable to a prince). The emotional impact is intensified by the image of the bereaved widowhood (cf. the poverty and social stigma of the widows in Lev 21:14; 1 Kgs 17:10-12; Job 24:3, 21; Is 1:23; 10:2; Ezk 22:7) as described in the opening verses. Jerusalem cannot escape memories of her past glory — the valued religious heritage of the Temple, sacrifices, and festivals. Not only is interrupted the religious system which is historically as well as symbolically related to the Solomonic Temple, but also the Lord seems to have eclipsed in His anger the daughter of Zion (2:1). The image of eclipse can be understood if we think of Zion as an honoured star which is now deposed from the heavenly vault: the city has been demolished (2:1), the honoured king and princes have been cast to the ground (2:1), and the horn of Israel's strength has been cut off (2:3).

Eighth. After the lexical, syntactical, grammatic, literary, and theological analysis, the study should be directed toward the proper application of the passage to our life issues and spiritual needs. Beware of over-allegorization or far-fetched spiritual application. We need to know the life issues of the passage in its sociocultural perspective, and then identify the issues and concepts given by the passage comparable to or contrasted with our current situation. Clarify possible areas of applications: faith, love, piety, interrelations between God and man, and man and man.

Example: The theophany and the admonition to Elijah at a cave in the Sinai desert (1 Kgs 19:1-21).

1) 40 days and 40 nights are intended to be the conventional round number of Semitic folklore: the duration of the reign of Solomon as of David, Moses' 40 years sojourn in the Medianite

wilderness, Moses' 40 days and 40 nights on the Mount of God, Israel's 40 years wilderness wandering, and even Jesus' 40 days in the Judean wilderness on the eve of his ministry.

2) The elusive presence of the Lord at the cave strongly points to the tradition of a definite cave on the holy mountain, possibly that from which Moses saw the back of Yahweh (cf. Ex 33:21ff). The emphasis of the "passing" of the Lord (cf. Ex 33:19) and that the Lord is not in the wind, earthquake, nor in the fire (1 Kgs 19:11ff) indicate that the Lord is not to be confined to a locale or in a definite form (cf. 1 Kgs 8:27). A still small voice is a dynamic expression of the solemn and awe-inspiring auditory manifestation of the Lord. But the voice, or (with the exception of the Incarnated Logos in Jesus) the theophany is not the invisible Spirit of God Himself (Is it not a commonplace that many people mistake the phenomena for the substance itself?)

3) The admonition of the Lord to Elijah (1 Kgs 19:9, 13) could appear to be a mild reprimand or a stern and ruthless rebuke, all depending on how the Deuteronomistic Historian⁴ intended in this writing or how urgently or severely the reader visualizes the picture in his or her auditory imagination. Despite the gap of communication between the writer and the reader, linkable possible only through the subtle use of language, we learn a profound lesson from 1 Kings 19. (1) A person with undaunted faith may have moments of weakness. Just like Elijah under the broom tree, he needs to be reminded of the great journey ahead of him. He needs spiritual power (symbolized by the baked bread and the water offered to Elijah by an angel) to continue his or her faith journey; (2) When one is spiritually blind, he fails to see a higher purpose of God. Just like Elijah, he only sees that he is the only zealous one fighting for the Lord (but ironically his zeal is extended to the confine of an isolated cave instead of a wide world). He never knows that the Lord has preserved seven thousand champions for the true faith in Israel; (3) The moment a person loses his vigour or work ethic because of age, physical limitation, or what is worse, disobedience, the divine commission must pass on to another person after His mind (cf. 1 Sam 13:14; 15:22f). This is why God told Elijah to

⁴ Deuteronomistic Historian: The writer or redactor of the historical books from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings.

ordain Elisha to succeed him.

Not all passages are applicable to our present-day faith condition. In this case, the quest for the Biblical studies will bring the other reward to us. Our knowledge and awareness of the depth, breadth, and the implied teaching of the Bible will be increased. We will not only worship God in spirit and truth, but also will critically read, study, and apply the divine will and divine word to our life. An effective training in biblical studies with adequate linguistic, literary, historical, and theological discipline will add a tremendous asset of understanding and enjoyment to the spiritual wisdom and spiritual power we have gained through prayers and self-awareness in faith and moral growth. Let us pray that the exegetical method as an important task of Bible studies be absorbed into our existing religious education and theological training curriculum. May the Lord strengthen us. Amen.

* * * * *

SELECTED Bibliographies for your library collection. The titles preceded by an asterik (*) are the basic booklist for those who would like to begin their Biblical studies.

I. Concordances and Bible Dictionaries:

John W. Ellison's *Nelson's Complete Concordance of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1957) or Robert Young's *The Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1955)

Edward P. Blair's *Abingdon Bible Handbook* (1975), or George A. Buttrick and Keith R. Crim (eds), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 5 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963) and its Supplementary Volume (1976).

II. Bibles in English, Hebrew, Greek, and Dictionaries:

* *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Hebrew text), (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1967/77)

* Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1966)

William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1971)

The Greek New Testament, 3rd ed. by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini and Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren (eds), (London: United Bible Societies, 1975.)

* Eberhard Nestle and Kurt Aland (eds), *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed., Stuttgart 1981.

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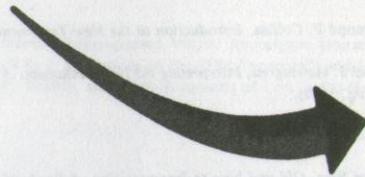
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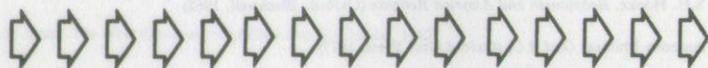
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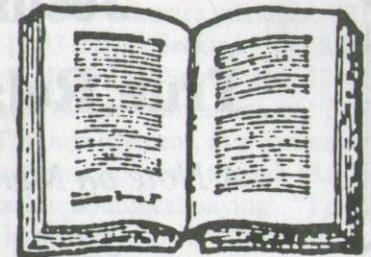
Paul Darcy

The Bible says, "Think with sober judgement" (Rom 12:3). It is easy for us to correct mistakes so scrupulously that we miss the right course. Either exaggeration or understatement is considered as deviation. If we stray from the truth and the right path for a prolonged period too long, it will be hard for us to return to them. The sub-standard then becomes the 'norm', and heresy will be accepted as the truth. The false doctrines are traditions stemming from cumulative errors, and the commandments and concepts of man cannot be considered as the doctrines of God. Unfortunately, from generation to generation, many stiff-necked people adhered to those heresies and refused to change.

The Word of God cannot be fettered. The truth always surfaces and radiates as a guiding light. For example, the pioneer of the Reformation in the 16th century, was able to proclaim boldly on "justification by faith" and "salvation by grace" as revealed in the Bible and he led the people to understand the Heavenly Way once more. Although these reforms, when compared with the doctrines of the Apostolic church, were incomplete, the doctrines were reverted to the path of the Bible.

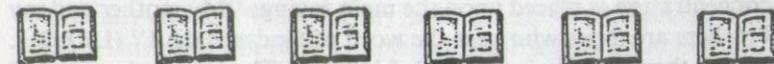


THE BIBLE



Reverting to the Bible is what today's true church should pursue (Php 3:12; Jer 6:16). Now is the time that the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth and entrusts us to "contend for the faith" (Jude 3), to correct apostasy and any deviation from the truth. The Apostles' teachings were taught or revealed directly by the Lord Jesus (Gal 1:16; Eph 3:3) and they are the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20), the standard of faith, daily life, conduct, and work (Is 8:20). Therefore, it is a need for us to return completely to the Bible truths, and to follow firmly the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Apostles (Mt 28:20; Ac 2:42; 1 Cor 11:2; 2 Cor 1:18; Gal 1:8; Php 4:9; 2 Thess 2:17; Jude 17). We must re-examine ourselves and be courageous enough to correct our mistakes and challenge boldly prevailing false teachings which have deviated from the Biblical truths.

We should not be content with our present conditions but strive unto perfection (Heb 6:1), keeping strictly to the Word of truth without adding or subtracting from it (Deut 4:1, 2). By doing so, we will please God and the true church will flourish as God's true messenger of salvation. □



Jesus' True Relatives

A Note on Mark 3:31-35

Yenzen Tsai

- 1 -

Mark 3:31-35 is a pronouncement story centering around an important Christian ethic: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mk 3:35). Mark acquainted this verse as the original saying of the Lord Jesus, and recorded a life situation of Jesus' ministry to illustrate its significance. In the Synoptic Gospels, only one parallel variant appears in Luke 11:27-28, when a woman cried out in the midst of Jesus' sermon: "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked" (Lk 11:27), and to which Jesus replied promptly: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:28). Here, it is possible that Luke had either borrowed Mark's saying or derived it from other non-Markan sources.

The passage, "Jesus' True Relatives", also appears in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but is put in very different contexts. Luke inserted the passage (Lk 8:19-21) after "The Parable of the Sower" to reinforce the latter's theological implication. The visiting scene of Jesus' relatives is shortened and simplified into two verses, and concentration is placed upon the main saying: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:21). This is theologically in line with Lk 8:11, "The seed is the word of

God". Again it is possible that Luke had derived the Lord's saying from Mark or other sources and added the modified version of Mark's story. Matthew meanwhile, followed more faithfully the Markan sequence, although he inserted extra passages, "The Trees and Their Fruits" (Mt 12:33-37), "Seeking for Signs" (Mt 12:38-42), and "The Return of the Evil Spirit" (Mt 12:43-45), all absent in the Gospel of Mark, before culminating in "Jesus' True Relatives" (Mt 12:46-50). This arrangement, as a consequence, differs from Mark's theological concern, even though Matthew kept almost word for word Mark's dominical saying: "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt 12:50). Therefore, whilst the saying is univocally emphasized in Mark and Matthew the story is varied according to the different needs.

- 2 -

Although a self-contained unit, Mark 3:31-35 should be examined in a broader context. The scene given for this passage was a house wherein gathered Jesus, His disciples, the crowd, and the scribes who came down from Jerusalem (Mk 3:20, 32). It opens with the arrival of Jesus' mother and brothers coming to seek Him (Mk 3:32). At the house, Jesus had just explained to His audience what an unforgivable sin was (Mk 3:28-29). His family's appearance seemed unexpected. Actually Mark had told us earlier the reason for the family's approach (Mk 3:21). Thinking that He was insane, they had come to look for Him out of their care and concern.

As the family came, they could not enter the packed house (Mk 3:32). By depicting Jesus surrounded by the crowd indoors (Mk 3:32), and His family left standing outside the house, Mark had dramatically distanced Jesus from His relatives. Furthermore, the family was portrayed as standing (Mk 3:31) while the people in the house were sitting around Jesus (Mk 3:32). This discriminatory treatment to Jesus' family was therefore intended to contrast the intimate relationship between Jesus and the crowd around Him.

When informed that His family were looking for Him (Mk 3:32b), Jesus answered: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (Mk 3:33). This reply not only complements the setting described above

(Mk 3:31-32), it also climaxes the whole story. Looking around His listeners, He replied: "Here are my mother and my brothers" (Mk 3:34). By acknowledging physically unrelated people as His relatives, including His disciples, Jesus thus pointed out the difference between the physical relatives and spiritual relatives. Mk 3:35, seen as part of the whole unit, functions to extend and complete Mk 3:34. It also helps to define, highlight, and characterize what Mk 3:31-34 intend to express theologically.

- 3 -

Mark's redactional¹ purpose, seen in Mk 3:31-35, was closely related to his theological consideration - discipleship. That is to say, he utilized this pronouncement story to illustrate what discipleship really meant. A general theological assertion in the Gospel of Mark is that to be Jesus' disciple involves making an unprecedented life decision. The high seriousness of this choice can only be recognized by comparing it to abandoning one's family and denying one's relatives. This is the reason why discipleship is always arranged side by side with family in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark, in the beginning of his Gospel, demonstrated two examples of true discipleship. When called by Jesus, Simon and Andrew "left their nets and followed him" (Mk 1:18). By the same manner, James and John "left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him" (Mk 1:20b). The resolution and conduct of these disciples substantiated Mark's understanding of discipleship:

"Peter began to say to him, Lo, we have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to

¹ 'Redaction' refers to 1) an author's selection and omission of traditional material; 2) the modifications of his material; 3) the arrangement of this material, and 4) the contributions from the author's own theological purpose.

come eternal life'" (Mk 10:28-30).²

Only those who severed themselves from the worldly concerns, that is to say, their possessions as well as their kinsmen, were qualified as Jesus' disciples. Mark also added persecution as a challenge for the disciples. The theological purpose is clear: he regarded it as inevitable to encounter misunderstanding and opposition from one's relatives once the decision to follow Jesus is made. Mk 6:1-6 further exemplifies incompatibility between Jesus and His kinsmen. Here Jesus went back to His country with His disciples. The result showed His own people "took offense at Him" (Mk 6:3b). In response to this situation, Jesus emphatically concluded: "A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (Mk 6:4).³ This remark could have been addressed to His country or, more meaningfully, to His disciples.

Significantly, Mark arranged "The call of the Twelve" before Jesus' encounter with His relatives. Mk 3:13-19 witnesses how the twelve were selected. Immediately, in Mk 3:20, they were brought into the house in which this pronouncement story happened. The event was intended to give His disciples a real demonstration of what discipleship essentially meant. Like the example in Mk 6:1-6, the disciples, although silent, were the audience who observed what was happening. From these episodes, they learned, on the one hand, the necessity of confronting misunderstanding and alienation from their families. On the other hand, they received encouragement and assurance that their special identity was guaranteed through a close relationship with the Lord.

- 4 -

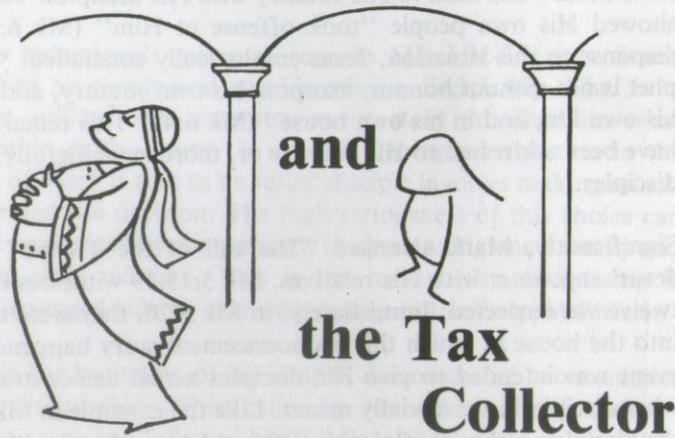
Mark brought out this story of "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother," to let the members in his community know that the disciple's life situation was so crucial if

² It is only in the Gospel of Mark where "seven abandonments" and "seven gains" in this world are deliberately placed side by side to illustrate and define discipleship. This shows that Mark was more conscious of this subject than Matthew and Luke.

³ This episode was recorded both in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew (Mt 13:57). But Mark listed one more "among his own kin" to emphasize his theological concern.

they became Christ's followers. Through his redactional arrangement, Mark created an ideal scene which best fitted his theological motive. Thus we see Mk 3:31-35 not so much a real open conflict between Jesus and his relatives but as a teaching aid for Markan community's practical needs. □

The Pharisee



LUKE 18:9-14

Yenzen Tsai

The parable of The Pharisee and The Tax Collector (Lk 18:9-14) is an exemplary story which Luke employs to illustrate his theological concerns. It is one of the so-called "four Lucan stories" that appears in the travel narrative (Lk 9:51-18:14) to convey Luke's theological messages.¹ Contextually, it lacks clear indication which may guide us to discern its setting of origination. It is rather a self-contained pericope² through whose revelatory process the reader is

¹ The other three Lucan stories are: the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37); the Rich Fool (Lk 12:16-21); the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31).

² Pericope: A unit of biblical material, such as a single miracle story, a parable, or an event.

directed to the final theological conclusion (v. 14b). In this sense the parable itself is a "pure narrative" as far as its literary form is concerned.³

Although the setting of The Pharisee and The Tax Collector is not clearly given, the introductory note along with the content bespeak the milieu of the parable. "Those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others" were the audience whom Jesus spoke to (v. 9). And they can be unmistakably identified with one of the two protagonists in the story - the Pharisee. On the one hand, this identification is in line with the antagonistic relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees developed thus far. And this parable is one more example of or a continuation of the ongoing polemic (cf. 5:17-26, 27-32, 33-35; 6:1-5, 6-11; 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-6; 15:1-2). On the other hand, it is not an unusual practice in Luke to see Jesus improvise stories on various occasions depending upon who were present and what sort of messages were most pertinent in relation to them (cf. 11:38; 14:7; 16:14; 19:11; 22:24). Seen in this light, structurally speaking, this parable should have no connection with the preceding parable of The Unjust Judge (Lk 18:1-8) owing to different audience and improvisation, although they all treat prayer as their common theme.

Luke 18:9-14 only appears here in the Gospels. The parable proper (vv 10-14a) is a unitary account that reveals no conflation. It was derived from the L' source which recorded the "traditional material".⁴ Luke added v. 9 to the parable as "the editorial preparation"⁵ with the purpose of generating smooth acceptance in introducing the story to his readers. This introductory note thus created a context in which the parable was to be properly understood. It enabled Luke's readers to identify more conveniently who and what the characters were and hence reach the intended theology more conclusively. V. 14b betrays Luke's redactional effort. In the first place, v. 14a as a pronouncement judgement has

³ Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, tr. by John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 178. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1981), p. 1183.

⁴ 'L' is an abbreviation of "Proto-Luke".

⁵ Bultmann, p. 334; Fitzmyer, p. 1183.

⁶ Bultmann, pp. 178, 334, 335.

already fittingly concluded the story. V. 14b is to be viewed as further extension of v. 14a. This last half verse is general and abstract in nature and may not be specially restricted to the case of The Pharisee and The Tax Collector. Furthermore, it has already appeared in Lk 14:11 to conclude a parable whose setting and theological gist are different from those of the present one. The fact that Matthew also employs it in Mt 23:12 attests to the common source, most likely Q⁷, from which the two evangelists tapped. Admittedly v. 14b as a doublet in Luke's redaction is to drive home more forcefully his theological purpose.

In the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke stresses at least three important themes: prayer, mercy, and humility, although v. 14a and v. 14b tend to bring the last theme more prominently to the foreground. To state it more clearly: using the instance of prayer, Luke intends to tell his readers the right attitude towards God as well as God's reaction towards humanity in relation to this attitude.

It is significant to note that the present parable functions as the finale in the Lucan travel account (Lk 9:51-18:14). Along with the preceding parable of the Unjust Judge (Lk 18:1-8), they jointly illustrate the importance of prayer that is theologically highlighted in Luke-Acts⁸. To demonstrate two different attitudes of prayer, Luke employs a Pharisee and a tax collector as two personae for dramatic contrast (v. 10). The Pharisee⁹ began his prayer with self-congratulation. He first stated what he avoided to do — extortion, injustice, and adultery (v. 11b), which are, of course, strictly prohibited by the Law (cf. Ex 20:14-15; Deut 5:17-18). He further counted what he actually performed - fasting twice a week and giving tithes of all acquisitions, which are beyond what the Law prescribes (cf. Lev 16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32; Num 29:7; Deut

⁷ 'Q': Siglum derived from the first letter of the German word Quelle ("Source"). It designates a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus, generally regarded as the principal source of the discourse material common to Matthew and Luke.

⁸ *Proseuchomai* or *proseuche* appears more frequently in Luke-Acts than in any other NT writing. Important figures like Jesus, Peter, Paul etc., are all portrayed as men of prayer. Cf. Lk 1:10; 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1; 19:46; 22:40; Acts 1:14, 24; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4, 6; 8:15; 9:11, 40; 10:4, 9; 12:5, 12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:13, 25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8.

⁹ The observance of fixed hours of prayer was recognized as a distinctive sign of a Pharisee on the first century A.D. See Joachin Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 249.

14:22-23, 25-27; Num 18:21-24).¹⁰ Purity and tithes are thus the two virtues cherished for his Pharisaic integrity. By contrast, the tax collector, who was notorious for his ruthless exaction as customs official¹¹, — manifested his remorse in lowly gesture — standing far off (the center of the holy place), lowering down his eyes, and beating his breast (v. 13a; cf. Lk 23:48). He confessed that he was a sinner and accordingly prayed for nothing but mercy (v. 13b).¹² After depicting these two characters expressing antithetic attitudes in prayer, Jesus pronounced his judgement: not the Pharisee but the tax collector who was justified (v. 14a; cf. 7:29, 35; 10:29; 16:15). This final verdict turned out to be a reversal. It condemned what seemed right (*dikaïos*) while redeemed what seemed sinful (*hamartoulos*) according to the Law.

To Luke's mind, prayer is important, but to pray with the right attitude is of greater importance. To convey this message, Luke adopts the "challenge and repose" formula the development of which is twofold in the present parable. In the story itself, the Pharisee challenged all the "unrighteous" persons in general and the tax collector in particular in terms of ethical integrity in the presence of the Law (v. 11b). His motivation was to win "acquired honour"¹³ from God. The tax collector, with all the publicly recognized sins, was in a situation of shame when confronted with such a challenge. But, his being justified in Jesus' final pronouncement dramatically reversed the expected honour/shame relationship (v. 14a). The challenger fell while the challenged rose, as a result. This reversing consequence tallies with Lucan theology (1:51-53; 2:34-35; 6:20-26; cf. 19:1-10).

In the broader context, this challenge and repose formula also testifies to the antagonistic relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees. As mentioned, v. 9 as an introductory note discloses that the Pharisees were the audience. It is hence evident that this parable was formulated as a repose against the challenge from the Pharisees

¹⁰ "The accomplishment of works of supererogation was an integral part of the very essence of Pharisaism and its ideas of meritorious behaviour". Jeremias, *Ibid.*, p. 250

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹² *Hilastheiti*, be merciful or *hilaskomai*, to propitiate, only appears here and in Heb 2:17 in the NT.

¹³ Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), pp. 29-30.

that had been going on for a while (cf. 5:29-32; 7:36-50). If Jesus was accused of consorting with the sinners (Lk 7:34), the fact that the tax collector was justified by God also bespoke Jesus being raised up over his opponents.

The attitude required in prayer is humility. Luke vividly delineates the Pharisee as a man of arrogance although the latter is justifiable according to the Law. Fasting twice a week (Mondays and Thursdays) and paying tithes of what one acquires were evidence of supererogation. What is worse was that the Pharisee was boasting of his deeds in his prayer. By belittling "this tax collector" (v. 11b) he was intending to uplift himself. He was actually not praying but numbering his merits in the hope of obtaining more favours from God. This self-conceited attitude is considered a sin, according to Luke. The tax collector, on the other hand, represents the positive attitude needed in prayer. What he demonstrated was nothing but the acute awareness of his being sinful and candid public confession. Repentance in humility is the key notion that Luke repeatedly emphasizes in Jesus' salvific ministry (cf. 5:30, 32; 7:34, 36-50; 13:1-5; 15:7; 19:1-10).

Finally, Luke explicitly affirms the powerful inclusiveness of God's mercy towards the poor, the sick, the sinners, and the lost (Lk 4:18-19). The tax collector was justified and exalted due to his contrite prayer, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (v. 13b). But, it is God whose divine grace extends salvation to the despised and the despairing. Mercy (*eleos, oiktirmos*) features prominently in the Lucan theological scheme (cf. 1:50, 54, 58, 72, 78; 6:36; 10:36-37; 17:13-14; 18:35-42). To Luke's mind, if the Pharisee should be humbled because of his self-conceit, it is God's mercy that exalts the humbled tax collector. This divine grace is assuredly given to whoever prays in humility. □



The Truth

F. Y. Yeung



Jesus Christ is the Truth (Jn 14:6). Also, the Word of God is the Truth (Jn 17:17), which was spoken and written by men through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20-21). These great words of truth were compiled and published as the sacred book known as the Holy Bible or Holy Scriptures.

* * * * *

Truth and deceit are in opposition to each other. God is true and unchangeable, but deceit is from Satan who sins from the beginning (Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:8). He opposes God and commits murder (1 Jn 3:12). Satan uses two deceptive plans to beguile human beings:

- 1) He causes man to doubt God's words, evident in the fall of Adam and Eve.
- 2) He instigates hatred in man; the first incident happened to Cain and Abel.

As there is no truth in him, Satan is the adversary of righteousness, causing man to disbelieve the truth of God's words (Ac 13:10).

Under the control of the devil, the world is in darkness without the light of the Gospel. But thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ He has overcome the devil and saves those who believe in His name.

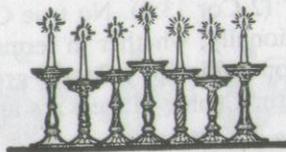
* * * * *

The scripture says, "For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth" (2 Cor 13:8). No true Christian would go against the truth intentionally, whether in terms of personal conduct or of a doctrine propounded by a church group, but he is willing to strive for the truth. Cephas (Peter) ate and associated with

the Gentile believers in Antioch, but when the Jewish circumcision party arrived, he withdrew himself from the Gentiles. Seeing this, Paul openly reproved him for not complying with the truth of the Gospel (Gal 2:11-14), for the Gospel emphasizes ONE BODY in Christ (Gal 3:27-29). Cephas had more respect for man than God's truth and this contradicted his Christian beliefs. On the other hand, the first Council at Jerusalem concluded with a submission to the guidance of the Holy Spirit who decides that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised (Ac 15:15). Though many rose to impose Gentile circumcision prior to Elder James' conclusion, they acknowledged the freedom granted by Christ to His children.

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God's Word has given us guidelines on how to approach and understand Him. Today, we need to pray with a humble heart for the Holy Spirit who will teach us to understand the truth. For the Lord Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the Truth" (Jn 16:13), the complete truth. Therefore we need to ask the Holy Spirit to lead us into His Truth (Jn 16:13); to love the Truth (2 Thess 2:10) and to denounce falsehood; to strive diligently in discovering all the possible interpretations and implications of the Truth (Php 3:12); to believe that the Bible contains the treasure of Truth (2 Tim 3:15-16); to respect and accept the Scripture in its true meanings — rightly handling the true word (2 Tim 2:15); to foster the truth and let no personal supposition take its place (2 Cor 13:8-9); to hold fast to the common faith (Jude 3); to recognize the importance of acting on the truth and to acknowledge that the Lord's grace is given to all who would humbly research, learn and practise His will. From now on, we, God's children, should bear the truth of God as a light and lamp to our path, and stand firm with truth as girdle around our waist (Eph 6:14). When striving for the truth, we must act and think on the same principle and purpose of the truth in the Bible. □



Some Thoughts

on



Anonymity

The Importance of Prayer

Prayer is essential for all Christians. It should occupy a place of singular importance in their daily lives, for true Christians never outgrow their need for prayer any more than their need for air and food. Prayer is an indication of the spiritual condition of the soul — it is being to the soul what breath is to the body. It quickens our faith and is our armour against evil.

Meditation

Aside from prayer, meditation is the best way to achieve communication with God. When we meditate on His precepts (Ps 119:15), His laws (Ps 1:2), His statutes (Ps 119:48), His testimonies

(Ps 119:99), and on all His wondrous works (Ps 77:12; 145:5) we will cleanse our inner being and be filled with spiritual understanding and wisdom.

Intercession

Intercession means to beseech and beg God for a favour on behalf of our neighbour and entreating for his good, just as the Holy Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Rom 8:27). The Bible shows that Moses is a great intercessor. He interceded for the sons of Israel (Ex 32:11-13; 33:12-16; 34:9; Deut 9:18-21; 10:10). Others like Aaron (Num 6:22-27), Samuel (1 Sam 7:5-13; 12:19, 23), Solomon (1 Kgs 8:22-53), and Hezekiah (2 Kgs 19:14-19) are the exemplars. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings, had peculiar power and they acted as mediators between God and men, but in the New Testament Jesus Christ is our High Priest and mediator who intercedes for us. For this reason, while we intercede for the others, we need to turn to the Lord Jesus in our weakness.

Praising God

Prayer expresses not only our adoration of God's greatness, mercy and goodness, but also our thanksgiving to Him for His mighty works. We praise God and thank Him for the opportunity to behold and hear of His great glory. In God we take pride continually, giving thanks to Him for ever (Ps 44:8). In worship we give thanks to Him and praise His name (Ps 100:4), for He is worthy of praise (2 Sam 22:4; Ps 18:3) and to be glorified. The word "HALLELUJAH" we say in prayer means PRAISE GOD, from whom salvation, glory, honour and power come (Rev 19:1). We are God's people (1 Pet 2:9; Eph 1:3-14; Php 1:11), and so we must give honour and pleasure to Him on the following special grounds:

Firstly, we praise God for the divine plan of salvation for mankind (Lk 1:68-69) which enables us to have victory over death and the grave (1 Cor 15:57). This free gift of eternal life is through the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Lord. We should thank God for our own salvation as well as the conversion of others (Rom 6:17) through the gospel (2 Cor 2:14).

Secondly, we praise God for His deliverance and protection. David praised and thanked God for delivering him from King Saul who sought for his life (2 Sam 22:1-51). Likewise, when we face persecution or tribulation, we must pray to God for help. We are not fighting with flesh and blood, but against the principalities, the powers, and the rulers of this present darkness (Eph 6:12). For this reason, we praise God for the wisdom and might which we have received from Him.

Thirdly, we praise God for His grace and tender care. He cares for us as a mother hen gathers her brood (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34). We are grateful to Him for the continuous supply of daily necessities such as food, drink, clothing, but more important, for spiritual nourishment for our soul and His wonderful spiritual gifts for the divine commission.

Supplication

"The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer" (Ps 6:9). If we have confidence in Him, we know that He hears us in whatever we ask (1 Jn 5:14-15). We should ask in our prayers for the following things:

- 1. Wisdom** "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him" (Jas 1:5). When Solomon asked for wisdom God bestowed upon him wisdom, riches, honour and long life (1 Kgs 3:7-14; 2 Chr 1:10-12). We ask God to give us wisdom so that we can distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:4), weigh what is said (1 Cor 14:29) and discern between truth and falsehood.
- 2. His deliverance** When we encounter great tribulation, we should pray to our Heavenly Father. Let our requests be made known to God (Php 4:6) who will certainly not let us down. When Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed for him and as a result, Peter was delivered (Ac 12:5).
- 3. The Holy Spirit** Receiving the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance in heaven (Eph 1:13-14) and is essential for our salvation (Jn 3:5; Ac 2:38). Speaking in tongues is the evidence of

The Message of the Second Isaiah:

Grace and Hope to the Exiles



M. Tsai

Nowadays many scholars doubt whether the chapters 40-66 of the book of Isaiah are the words of the eighth-century B.C. prophet Isaiah. They agree with the hypothesis, put forward by Doederlein in 1775, which had been anticipated by Ibn Ezra in the 12th century that the prophecies contained in these chapters came from a later time based on historical situation, unity of language, and the prophetic message.

* * * * *

The author of chapters 1-39 is dated in the eighth century B.C. The superscription in Is 1:1 asserts that Isaiah prophesied during the days of Uzziah (783-742), Jotham (742-735), Ahaz (735-715) and Hezekiah (715-687), Kings of Judah. Such a broad introductory note in 1:1 quite clearly has been composed at a relatively late stage in the literary growth of the book, as the presence of an earlier heading in 2:1 shows. 1:1 is not an editor's inference drawn from the contents of the book. Isaiah did not receive his call to be a prophet until "the year that king Uzziah died" (Is 6:1), namely the year of 742. He began his ministry at a time when the relationship between Israel (Ephraim) and Judah was more strained and hostile than at any time since the two kingdoms had fallen apart after

Solomon's death (cf. Is 7:17).

The major political events which affect the entire period of Isaiah's activity are the military and political threat posed to Israel and Judah by the Assyrians whom Isaiah regarded as the rod of the divine anger (Is 10:5-15). Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727), Shalmaneser V (727-722), Sargon II (722-705), and Sennacherib (705-681) were the four great rulers of the neo-Assyria who directly impinged upon the affairs of Israel and Judah. During his ministry, Isaiah found himself confronted with Ahaz who was bent on betraying the historic unity of Judah and Ephraim by appealing to Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria to rescue him from the sister kingdom in the north. Further he considered inconceivable any alliance with Egypt attempted by Hezekiah at the time of the Ashdodite rebellion or Judah's rebellion against Assyria in the years 705-701 (Is 28:14-22; 30:1-5). These alliances would, according to the prophet, be in opposition to the "plan" of Yahweh. The prophet rebuked the people of Jerusalem (Is 3:13-15, 16-24; 5:5-24; 10:1-4a) for their insensitivity in celebrating their own personal survival from the sufferings which the rest of the nation had endured, and to which most of it had fallen victim (Is 22:1-4, 12-14). Throughout those painful years from Uzziah's death to Jerusalem's surrender to Sennacherib in 701, Isaiah's preaching pointed a way back to God, and to a willingness to remain obedient to Him (cf. Is 30:15).

* * * * *

Now let us come to the Deutero-Isaiah (DI), or the second part of Isaiah (chapters 40-66). The prologue (Is 40:1-11) and the epilogue (Is 55:6-11) give the collection a self-contained appearance. Chapters 41-48 are devoted to the expectation of Cyrus, 49-55 focus on the coming salvation for Zion and for the chosen people of God. In addition, included are the much-discussed Songs of the Servant of Yahweh (Is 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). The historical occasion for DI's message was the victorious advance of Cyrus, the Persian king (reign 550-529), who had in 547-546 just conquered Croesus of Lydia and overrun Asia Minor. Cyrus had been roused by Yahweh to crush Babylon and liberate the Israelites (Is 41:25ff, 44:24-45:7; 46:8-11). That Yahweh is Lord of human history achieves its highest expression: After a solemn introduction

in which God presents Himself as Creator and Lord of history (Is 44:24-27), the word is issued to the Persian king (Is 45:1f, 41:25ff; 44:28), whom Yahweh summoned to carry out His divine purpose from the east (the rising of the sun, Is 41:2) or in another passage, from the north (Is 41:25: Cyrus's conquest of the Median empire in 550 B.C. had made him master also of territories to Babylon's north). This is a bold expression — "God's anointed" — addressed to a foreign king who is in the service of other deities, but God rouses him to serve His purpose (Is 45:13); God's activity took place "for the sake of my servant Jacob and Israel my chosen" (Is 45:4).

1. A Message of Hope

Israel's present condition depicted in Isaiah 40-55 is a message of hope against the background of sin and failure.

The present situation of the people is expressed in terms of the rightness of divine judgement. At the very outset the message of hope is set against the background of failure:

She [Israel] has completed her compulsory service,
her guilt is paid off.

She has received from the hand of Yahweh
the equivalent for all her sins.

(Isaiah 40:2)

The direct association between God's anger and Israel's national destiny is repeatedly made clear (Is 42:24; 50:1; 54:7-8). It is not as if God has repudiated his people, nor as if He has used it to pay off a bad debt. The whole responsibility rests upon the people themselves for their present condition. The prophet thus emphasizes the importance of the covenantal relationship between God and His people.

2. The Enduring Validity of the Word of the Lord.

The enduring validity of God's word is a fundamental element in the message of DI. The awe-inspiring splendour of Yahweh and His

abiding word are first contrasted with the fleeting beauty of the fragile humanity (Is 40:7-8), then expressed in the polemic against the idols and gods (Is 40:18f; 41:24, 29; 44:9-20; 46:1f), and finally, Is 55:8-13 as a conclusion to the entire collection discusses how the word of Yahweh subsumes His inscrutable thoughts and ways, promise, proclamations of salvation, and how the superiority of Yahweh is embodied through His word in the course of history. In Deutero-Isaiah we note that:

The word of the Lord proceeding from the exalted thoughts of Yahweh that surpass all human understanding, resembles the snow and rain that fall upon the earth without engendering fertility there.

The word of God is the real power that shapes history, remaining constant in the midst of changes.

The contrast between perishable humanity and the enduring reality of Yahweh is a confession deriving from Israel's hymnology (Ps 103:14-18), and so a summons to approach God and to seek Him (Is 55:6-7; cf. Amos 5:6; Jer 29:12-23).

3. New Exodus and the Transformed Landscape.

Isaiah 55:12-13 records the joyous exodus of Israel (from exile) amid the rejoicing of nature, as a consequence of the divine word. The new exodus, far surpassing the exodus from Egypt (Is 43:16-21; 48:1-11), has its prototype in Hosea's expectation of a new period in the desert followed by a new entrance into Canaan (Hos 2:14-17). Forget the first exodus, says the prophet, for now Yahweh is doing something new (Is 43:18-21). Isaiah 43:16ff underlines the superiority of the "new" (antitype) to the "old" (type), for the faithfulness of Yahweh remains true to his cause.

The liberation of the exiles, which is conceived as a new exodus, results in a triumphal procession through a desert. There comes a description of the road leading home (Is 41:17-20), for which the desert will be transformed into a garden and upon which God will lead His people in wondrous fashion (Is 42:14-17; 49:9-11; 43:2). From every distant place they will return (Is 43:5-7; 49:12). The Lord will go before Israel and be their rear guard (Is 52:12). In the

desert, Israel will not only find water running from the rock to slake their thirst (Is 48:21, cf. Ex 17:5-6, Num 20:7ff), but will see the barren desert itself transformed. There will be pools of water, and trees will grow to give shade.

Why does the transformation take place? It is because of Zion, the great goal of the new exodus. There the watchmen and messengers are already proclaiming the kingship of Yahweh with rejoicing, so that the very ruins of Jerusalem break forth in exultation and all the ends of the earth see the salvation of the God of Israel. Zion will be rebuilt in all its glory (Is 54:11-12). Jerusalem, barren and desolate, will behold the ingathering of the Diaspora in amazement (Is 43:5-6). In Is 49:12 the prophet gives the same comprehensive scope of the return home not only of exiles from Babylon, but of all the dispersed Israelites from afar, north, west, and the land of Syene or Sinim, namely, the district on the southern frontier of ancient Egypt (cf. Ezek 29:10; 30:6; Jer 44:1, the Dead Sea Scroll 1QIsa¹ and the Elephantine Papyri). The flood of the ingathering was so great that there is no longer room for them in her tent (Is 54:1-3).

4. **Yahweh's Power and Glory:** the majesty of the creator (Is 40:12ff)

How does one explain that God makes light and creates darkness and that He effects prosperity and creates trouble?

DI goes beyond Genesis 1 and includes darkness and trouble totally within the power of the creator. It is significant for the prophet to include the good and the evil into the all-embracing divine power. What has it to do with the problem of suffering or evil? This will warrant a lengthy theological discussion, at which this present essay will not attempt, from the history of the Israelite religion.

The creation of the ends of the earth (Is 40:28), the constellations (Is 40:26), human beings (Is 45:12), and the fashioning of Israel (Is 43:1) in the past are as much the work of the creator as the

¹1QIsa: Refers to one of the two Isaiah Scrolls found in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea.

deliverance of the imminent future (Is 55:1-7) which pours forth like the rain of the heavens and blossoms like flowers.

As with Ezekiel, Isaiah uses "I Am" to demonstrate the absolute sovereignty of God. Usually, "I am" saying is used to indicate (1) how a divine being made himself known (Selbstvorstellungsformel), or (2) a self predication (i.e. the proclamation of attitudes or properties) or a self-glorification on the part of a god. DI was the first in Israel to show God glorifying Himself in His majesty:

- * "I am the first and the last" (Is 41:4; 43:13; 44:6; 48:12).
- * "Beside me there is no God" (Is 43:11; 44:6b; 45:5, 18, 21, 22; 46:9).
- * "Who is like me?" (Is 44:7).

The term "redeem", an expression of grace in DI, describes in legalistic term the repurchase of someone who has been sold into slavery for debt. The initial tie between Yahweh and His people has been enthralled by alien powers. With a mighty hand Yahweh now "redeems" his people (cf. with a huge ransom Yahweh pays for his people Is 43:3-4). He breaks the power of Babylon which is holding Israel captive (Is 47), and this event is announced in a vivid oracle. Israel cannot point to any righteousness of its own to justify its release: it is a free act of Yahweh's sovereign grace that redeems Israel and bestows a new future.

"I am Yahweh, I myself, and none but I can deliver" (Is 43:11). Yahweh's actions include the assurance that even though the mountains and hills may shake, Yahweh's favour and covenant will not depart from Israel (Is 43:11). The covenant is renewed. Just as Yahweh once promised to Noah by means of a covenant that he would never again destroy the earth with a deluge, so now he will swear never again to vent his wrath against Israel (Is 54:9-10). Unlike the new covenant envisioned by Ezekiel or Hosea, the old covenant in DI has never been renounced by Yahweh. The gracious Lord has not given Israel a bill of divorce; the marriage is still in effect (Is 50:1).

5. **A Promise of Salvation.**

The most characteristic form of DI's words of salvation is the promise, or oracle of salvation (Is 41:8-13, 14-16; 43:1-4, 5-7; 44:1-5; 45:11; 51:13; 54:5, 13). DI starts from the priestly oracle of salvation, the answer communicated by the priest to an individual lament (1 Sam 1). It is introduced by the call "Do not fear" (Lam 3:57), and the promise of salvation is substantiated by means of a clause with the verb in the perfect tense (and/or a noun clause). Strictly, the answer is the promise that a prayer is to be granted: the priest thereby promises that God has hearkened to the supplication. It rests upon the assumption that God has already decided how He would act. This is why it is couched in the perfect tense. DI detached the form from its original cultic setting, and changed it into a promise of salvation decided upon by God for the nation.

In addition to the message of hope, joy is another salient feature of DI's message of comfort. The moment the exiles arrive back home, Zion-Jerusalem becomes a herald of joy (Is 40:9; 52:8, 9). The command to exult and rejoice is recorded in Is 41:16; 51:11; 52:9; 54:1; 55:11, 12). The returned exiles are addressed to the inhabitants round about (Is 42:11f), to the ends of the earth (Is 42:10), to the sea and the islands, the desert and its inhabitants (Is 42:10f), to the wild beasts of the desert (Is 43:20), to heaven and earth, mountains and trees (Is 44:23; 49:13; 55:12). □

Lecture partially given at the Bible Seminar,
London Church,
31st July — 5th August, 1986.



Testimonies

Abundant Grace

Julie Wong

Hallelujah! In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I bear witness.

In August 1980, nine people were converted and baptized in the True Jesus Church, Toronto, Canada. The baptism took place in Lake Ontario which is the smallest of the Great Lakes and has an area of 7,500 square miles with a depth of 740 feet.

During baptism, my sister and I saw that the water was pink in colour, but we kept quiet about it. Some church members took photographs, and when they were developed and printed, my family noticed that the water was indeed pink around the area where the baptism took place, but just a few feet away the water was blue. The photographs that we saw were taken from three different cameras. The pinkness occurred during the baptism of several people. Thank and praise the Lord for letting us witness such a wonderful and miraculous sign of the Lord.

This is to confirm what we believe is true, that during baptism it is the blood of Jesus Christ that washes away the sins, not with water only, but with water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, water, and the blood; and these three agree. We are indeed very fortunate to witness such great wonders of the Lord, for the witness of God is greater than that of men (1 Jn 5:6-9).

Another miracle which happened on the same day was the feeding of 25 people. After baptism, I invited the Jung family of 5, having cooked enough food for my own family as well as for them. Other members of my family had also invited some church members for

lunch without informing me. For that reason, I had not made provision for them. After every one had eaten and was full, I counted 25 people. Normally one pound of rice noodles is just sufficient for my own family of six. It is hard to believe that two pounds of rice noodles and some dessert could feed 25 people. I had a loaf of bread on the table but only two slices were eaten. It is indeed so wonderful that the Lord had provided sufficient food for all of us on that great and happy day. Praise the Lord and glory to His name.

It was an unforgettable memory for all of us and we were very grateful to the Lord for showering His blessings upon us. There was great joy in heaven because nine souls were added to the Lord's fold. There was great gladness for Toronto Church because the Lord had bestowed His signs and miracles on His believers. The faith of the congregation was henceforth strengthened. This confirms that Jesus Christ is with us. We have full confidence that with God's might and love and also with the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, this little flock in Toronto will grow and grow into a great and glorious church before the Lord comes again. Honour and glory be to His wonderful Name. □

Repay Evil with Good

Gideon Ho

Hallelujah, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I bear witness.

Many years ago, my wife and I came to Scotland and opened a restaurant near Edinburgh. Thank God for blessing us all this time.

On the night of the 30th November, 1984, a few youths came into the restaurant and began swearing at us. They went down into my cellar, stole some eggs, and threw them at me. With the help of a few customers, I threw them out immediately. These youths cursed

loudly outside my restaurant. Fearing trouble, I called the police, but by the time they arrived the youths had left. I thought that the trouble was over.

About twenty minutes later while I was cleaning up and ready to close the restaurant, another group of youths rushed in. One of them held an axe in his hand, while another drew out his knife and stood guard at the door. The youth with the axe came in and started destroying everything he could see in my restaurant. I noticed that he was one of the youths who had been here earlier. I stood helplessly behind the counter. As the youth was coming over to me, my mother-in-law came out of the kitchen to see what was going on, and immediately she shouted: "Hallelujah, in the name of Jesus I cast out Satan!" Upon hearing this, the youth stopped what he was doing instantly and left, although he did not understand what had been said. Before he left he smashed one of my windows. A customer called the police while I stood by the door and kept an eye out for this youth. But on the arrival of the police they had all escaped. While on my way to the police station to give some statements, I saw this youth walk by my restaurant as if nothing had happened. I hurriedly called a policeman and together we followed this youth and seized him outside his house. Later I found that I had suffered about £ 1,000 in damage, but thank God, I was not in the least harmed.

This youth was released on bail, and while waiting for the trial he often came around, cursing loudly and threatening me. I was very frightened that he would repeat his earlier behaviour. I closed my restaurant early at night for fear, and every small noise would terrify me. I lived in constant fear. I decided that I could not go on like this and so I prayed to God for help. In my prayer I was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to think of many examples in the Bible, such as Isaac who, in the Valley of Gerar, followed God's command prospered, turning his enemies into friends. Jacob, who feared revenge from Esau, prayed to God, and the brothers were reunited in peace. David, while being chased by Saul, prayed to God and God delivered his enemies into his hands. I received great comfort from these examples, and prayed to God on behalf of this youth, that he might not be used by Satan to destroy peace in the community.

Wonderful things began to happen after this prayer. One night on seeing this youth coming into my restaurant, I prayed to God that he would not harm me. But this youth showed no signs of hostility and even greeted me. I took this opportunity to have a talk with him. He told me that he would be going to jail the next week, for he had been sentenced to three months jail and had to pay for all the damage he had caused. He admitted that he was wrong, and said that after he completed his term in jail he would look for a job and try to live a new life. I was overjoyed and thanked God in my heart. I told him that I was a member of the True Jesus Church, and that the whole thing should be forgotten. Should he have any trouble in the future he could come to see me. I urged him to stop drinking, for this had been the cause of his earlier violence. He was very moved. He shook hands with me and expressed the wish that we would become friends.

From this incident I see God's grace. He not only helps me all the time, but also lays a feast for me before my enemies. His love has transformed a person who was like a ravenous wolf to one like a lamb. Paul told us to bless those who curse us and pray for those who harm us. "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink, for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head" (Rom 12:14-20). James says, "Whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (Jas 5:20). May all glory be to God and may all readers be edified after reading this testimony. Amen.

"Do not say, 'I will repay evil';
wait for the Lord, and He will help you."

(Proverbs 20:22) □

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**Erratum:** In the previous issue [June 1986], page 15, line 14 the text should have read as follows:

One group of children plays the flute and bid their companions to dance to their merry music. The other children then sing a dirge, beating their chests and calling upon the companions to mourn.

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