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THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



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REV. BEN VAN LIERE

ASCENSION

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended
up on high, he led captivity captive,
and gave gifts unto men.” (Eph 4:8)

In Jerusalem, you can visit many “holy” sites. Note the use of quotation marks, because you may not find much holiness at any of them, crowded as they are with tourists and all the gaudy flim-flam that clings to such groups. A good Christian tour guide is essential.

Whether truly old or reconstructed to seem ancient, these buildings and areas have their interesting, sometimes fascinating, stories. Some visitors are induced to quiet contemplation, others are just gawkers. Most of the sites are venerated by both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, while a few even fall within the liturgical orb of Islam. It is when you go outside such a place or beyond these areas that you may get a sense of awe that in this place; within the borders of this small, dusty, noisy little country, the Lord God worked out the salvation of His people. That makes it worth a visit, even though it may be only for a fleeting impression. The anchor of our faith must and does lie deeper than that.

The Chapel of the Ascension is situated on Mount Scopus, the ascent of the Mount of Olives (2 Samuel 15:30). Google it to get a view. The chapel is a rather drab little tower at the end of a drab little street, ancient houses leaning the one against the other, all the same grayish sand tint. This chapel and its adjacent higher tower have served as Muslim and Christian worship centres at various times since 384 A.D. As its name indicates, it is believed to be the very spot from where Jesus ascended to heaven. The “holiest” spot of all is a large, flat desert stone, set a little deeper into the roughly stone-paved floor, surrounded by a wooden framework to prevent worshippers from stepping on it, although they may kneel over it and kiss it.

Whether or not the Lord actually ascended from this exact spot is of no importance; that He did ascent from somewhere on the Mount of Olives is a confession of impact as great as His birth, death, and resurrection. Why is there so little commemorative activity surrounding this event? We have Christmas celebrations, Good Friday and Easter holidays, and various others. Why not Ascension Day? It is still observed in some European and Eastern countries, primarily under Eastern or Roman Catholic influence, but if there is a “holiday,” it is more like our early summer “remembrance-type” days. Why has this fact in the life of the Lord fallen out of sight? Primarily, because He has fallen out of sight.

Christmas? Who cannot celebrate the birth of a child? Who does not need a mid-winter break? That’s all Christmas was, really: Saturnalia, stripped of its debauchery – barely. Good Friday? Bewail-

ing our sins, which sent Him, the only truly good man, to the Cross? Who still *has* sins, other than those committed against “Mother Earth”? We just need a savior from the sins of exploiting man and beast and whatever else has been deemed “exploited”. Conversion? Yes, to green energy. And renewal worked by His death and resurrection, sealed in His ascension into glory? Of course, Spring time, flowers, birds, and bunnies!

But He led captivity captive! Well, we try to believe that, but we are not sure what it means. Are all those things just mentioned not the elements of our captivity? The wide-spread corruption of so many good and honorable religious customs, are they not strictures enclosing us more and more - and in such a fearsome way because often we are not aware it. Church buildings are decaying before our eyes while congregations/owners, having failed to fill the buildings through various exciting programs, speakers, and events to change society, now scamper about to get the best price, hopefully to provide some funds to satisfy another earthly need.


Churches striving to be true are also struggling to have truly saving and impacting effects on souls and societies. We are still losing too many of our young people. Even one is too many.

What is happening to the Church? What is happening to the Church had happened then already: there were only eleven disciples staring into the sky, gazing after the Lord till that cloud, that one sight-robbing, hope-dashing cloud took Him from their view. Only **eleven** disciples, dismally, painfully portraying, “The harmony profaned: the perfect round is broken” (from K. Schilder, *Christ in His Suffering*). Christ’s work on *earth* was done – but the project was not finished. When He ascended “He took captivity captive” so that the liberation of His church could proceed.

At that moment, the disciples were stunned, speechless! Who wouldn’t be? Especially in their pre-science fiction age? What they saw broke all natural laws; it was foreign to every human experience. Of course it was: this was a demonstration of the power of God. This was the Lord of Heaven and Earth, lifting His Son into heaven, trailing captivity in His train of glory. But, the eleven there could see this no more than we can see the victory of King Jesus now on this earth. The Lord sent them two angels to help them.

Is captivity captive? Is the Church on earth free? It seems to be bound on every side, perhaps today more than ever. Anti-Christian thoughts have captured the minds of millions, shown also in the panicky confusion brought about by COVID. Many have lost confidence in national leaders, whether on the left or the right, because many of such leaders have done everything except give good leadership. We are kept in bonds of the anxiety of uncertainty about the economy, health care, education, world peace, food supplies – you name it.

Is captivity captive? Are we free from sin? Are we forgiven? There is a difference between forgiven and free of sin – God’s people know this. Oh, how we can have moments of pure joy, thankful relief when we may experience that the bonds of captivity are broken. We no longer *need* to sin because Christ has made us free. The chains are shattered, they have fallen off. But how sad, how sinfully ignorant and ignorantly blasphemous, when we pick up, again, those broken shackles, and play with them, disregarding the “Made in Hell” logo burned into them.

Christ is coming again and there will be a church anxiously awaiting Him. The “harmony” will be restored. The circle of disciples will be fully rounded. The Bible reveals scenes of this glory in multiples of twelve: twelve elders, twelve apostles, 12,000 from every tribe: 144,000 representing the total. Not one is missing. Does this really need personal, individual application? Why would you *not* be there? Indeed, He did promise to come again. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus”. 

Rev. C. Schouls is an emeritus Free Reformed pastor. He and his wife reside in Brantford, Ontario.

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OUR ABSOLUTE NEED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.” John 6:63a

Have we forgotten about the Holy Spirit? It takes the Triune God to save sinners: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Do we act and exist as if we don't need the Holy Spirit who is “co-eternal God with the Father, and the Son” (LD 20)?

We need the Spirit for everything. When we were baptized, we were baptized in the name of the Spirit as well as of the Son and of the Father. If we are married, we were declared husband and wife in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. When we confess our faith each Lord's Day, we say: “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” The salutation and benediction in church mentions the Holy Spirit. Are we conscious of our need of this Divine Person?

A Hard Saying

After feeding the multitudes with the loaves, Christ preached a sermon in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:35, 59). Initially, people were intrigued, even asking for bread that would make them never hunger again. However, when the Savior made clear that this bread was Himself, come down from heaven to suffer and die and give His life, many were offended at what they called “a hard saying” (John 6:60). Frankly, Christ's teaching wasn't palatable to them.

At this point the Lord speaks the words in our text: “It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.” Therein He makes clear that their response to Him is not surprising; in fact, it is entirely in line with living at the level of flesh. This expression “the flesh” does not mean here our “bodies,” but fallen human nature, life lived carnally, apart from God and His grace. As Jesus said to Nicodemus: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). Paul says that “they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh” (Rom. 8:5). They can't please God, but rather are enemies of God, and to be “carnally minded is death” (Rom. 8:6). We need the new birth, which is “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13).

Why Does the Flesh Not Profit?

Christ does not say that the flesh profits a bit. Paul would say later that “bodily exercise profiteth little” (1 Tim. 4:8). But not so the flesh. The flesh is utterly unprofitable because our hearts are by nature depraved. We do what displeases God, because all we do proceeds from our sinful hearts (Matt. 15:19) that are oriented on this life and on self. In addition, we are by nature in darkness, “having the understanding darkened” (Eph. 4:18). We don't understand

truth, and will not come to the light because our deeds will be reprov'd (John 3:20). What governs our life by nature is "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). We are estranged from God; we do not desire the knowledge of His ways (Job 21:14). As long as we are only living in the flesh, that is our description.

By nature we are not even sensible to that. We have no spiritual inclination to seek God, to heed His Word, to submit to His law, and certainly not to His righteousness (Rom. 12:3). His law falls on deaf ears; His gospel even more. We can't fix ourselves. We won't turn to God. We can't change course. We can't whip ourselves into shape. No wonder the Bible says that we are "dead in sins and trespasses" (Eph 2:1). Octavius Winslow says: "All is still, cold and motionless; death is there." The flesh profits you nothing.

Way for a Church to Revive

Spurgeon said: "One of the most effectual ways for a church to revive ... is to preach much about the Holy Spirit; after all He is the very breath of the church. And when a church, a minister, or a Christian, finds that it is wintertime in his soul he must turn to the Holy Spirit and cry: 'Quicken thou me in the Way.'" Certainly, the Lord Himself preached about the Spirit here in the Capernaum synagogue, where the Spirit needed to come. He pressed the need for the Spirit, and He praised the Holy Spirit, just as the Holy Spirit would later glorify Him (see John 16:14).

Just prior to Christ referring to the Spirit quickening (John 6:63a), He mentions His own ascension into heaven: "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (John 6:62) Christ would ascend into heaven to pour out this quickening Spirit. The outpouring of the Spirit is the work of the Father and the Son, based on Christ's finished work. One of the advantages that Christ's ascension into heaven brings His church is that "He sends us His Spirit as an earnest" (LD 18). Christ preached from heaven by sending forth the Holy Spirit, so that Peter preached a message God used to quicken three thousand souls (Acts 2).

Quickening

We will have no life in our soul unless the Holy Spirit quickens us. He is the one who gives the new birth. He "works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel and confirms it by the use of the sacraments" (LD 25). He unites to Christ and makes us a partaker of Christ and all His benefits. He comforts and abides with believers forever (LD 20). He seals them and witnesses with their spirit that they are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). He directs the child of God, assuring him or her, and interceding with groanings that cannot be uttered (Rom. 8). He gives hope and love and so much other fruit (Gal. 5). And He does this not just in individual hearts, but in the church, holding the church in life (Zech. 6:6). He equips her officers. He impels their evangelism. He preserves their unity. He gives them to witness before rulers and governors (Matt. 10:20). What can we do without the Holy Spirit?

How does God the Holy Spirit make dead sinners alive? Christ ends this verse by saying: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). Calvin comments: "Now the word is called spiritual, because it calls us upwards to seek Christ in his heavenly glory, through the guidance of the Spirit, by faith, and not by our carnal perception." In other words, the Spirit works through the Word, and begets life by the Word, as the Word speaks to us the doctrine of Christ. This does not mean that the words of Scripture do so automatically, but blessed by the Spirit, when they come "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4). We should search the Scriptures and trust their truth and power, asking for the Spirit to use them to enliven us.

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EDITOR: Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes
2692 Bridge Place NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
USA · T: 616.977.0599 ext.121
E: jerry.bilkes@prts.edu

ASSISTANT EDITOR:
Rev. David H. Kranendonk
T: 226.980.9607 · E: kranendonk@frcna.org
The Editors report to the Synodical Publications Committee.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
· Mr. David Tamminga
· Rev. Ian Macleod
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Janey Slingerland
(Publications Administrator)
18 Chapala Cres. S.E.
Calgary, AB T2X 3M4 CANADA
T: 403.254.6591 · E: bookorders@frcna.org

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Mrs. Rhonda Kroesbergen
(Messenger Administrator)
E: messenger@frcna.org

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Rev. Jerrold Lewis, General Editor
160 West Parkway
Pompton Plains, NJ 07444
E: jlewis@frcna.org

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MISSIONS AND OUTREACH CAUSES SHOULD BE DIRECTED AS FOLLOWS:

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REFUGEE FUND
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26829 – 33B Ave., Aldergrove, BC V4W 3G8
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Mr. John Wilbrink, Treasurer
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T: 905.659.7413 · E: john.wilbrink@gmail.com

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Direction

This enlivening does not take place through the sacrament of baptism. It is not triggered by being part of a group. It is not by becoming skilled in speaking accurately or faithfully about the Holy Spirit. It is not through outward reformation or conformity to a certain code of living. It is not through a certain experience or having nice feelings swell up in your inner being. It is not through a long road of gloom or doom, or withdrawing from the world and looking like people from former generations. It is not through slaying sin in your life or resisting some special temptation. All this is flesh and flesh profiteth nothing.

God is jealous of His own honor. He will show flesh for what it is: flesh. Samuel Davies wrote: “When we depend upon the instruments, we provoke the Spirit of God to leave us. If we are fond of taking ministers in his stead, we shall make the trial, till they and we wither away for want of divine influences. This provokes the blessed Spirit to blast the gifts of his ministers, to suffer them to fall, or to remove them out of the way, when they are set up as his rivals, that their idolaters may see they are but men.” That which is of the flesh is flesh.

The clear and basic direction Scripture gives regarding the Spirit is to pray for the Holy Spirit. Three passages will suffice. When confronted with the valley of dry bones, even after all the bones had come together and sinews and flesh appear on the bones, the great need remains: “Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live” (Ezek. 37:9). This is a command from the Lord to pray for the Holy Spirit in accordance with His own Word. In Acts 1:4, Christ likewise directed his church to “wait for the promise of the Father.” How did they “wait”? They obeyed Christ’s command by continuing “with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:14). They besought the Lord to open the windows of heaven and pour out the much-needed Holy Spirit, and that is what the Lord did. What a promise the Lord leaves us with to encourage us to pray: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13). May our absolute need of the Holy Spirit drive us to pray for God, the Holy Spirit. ¹

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REMEMBERING DR MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

REV. MAURICE J. ROBERTS

Just forty years ago, in March 1981, the great Welsh preacher, Dr David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, passed away and entered into his eternal rest. He must not be forgotten but should be loved and highly esteemed for his faithful preaching and for the excellent example which he gave to preachers and Christian believers all over the world. He was a man anointed by God to bring the gospel of salvation to many thousands who heard him.

The Early Years

Dr Lloyd-Jones was born on 20th December 1899 in South Wales. He was the second son of Henry and Magdalen Lloyd-Jones. In 1905 the family moved house to live in Llangeitho, a town where the eminent Welsh preacher Daniel Rowlands had preached in the eighteenth century. Dr Lloyd-Jones had two brothers, Vincent and Harold.

In 1909 a fire broke out in a store owned by his father. The young Martyn escaped from the fire by getting through an upstairs window. As a boy Martyn went to school in the nearby town of Tregaron where he clearly showed his excellent academic ability. In 1914 the family left Wales and moved to London. Here he attended the St Marylebone Grammar School, where it was clear that he was academically very talented. His desire at this point in life was to prepare to be a doctor. The family at this time now attended the Welsh Chapel, situated on Charing Cross Road in London.

In 1916, during the First World War, he began his course of medical training at St Bartholomew’s Hospital, London – commonly referred to as “Bart’s”. The eminent medical expert there, Thomas Horder, who was a Royal Physician, was famous and highly esteemed for his medical skill. He impressed his youthful Welsh student by his very careful method of diagnosing the medical problems of his patients. This skill was to be seen in the way Dr Lloyd-Jones, as a preacher, diagnosed the problems which he met with in those who sought his spiritual advice.

In 1921 he qualified as a doctor, with the degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery. However, his mind was now being turned from medicine to the work of the ministry. He saw the great need which people have to become right with God. His father and his older brother, Harold, had now both passed away and entered eternity. He saw also, very sadly, that Wales, which had had so much blessing since the eighteenth century, was now in decline. The greatest need of the hour was to get back to the Word of God, which is our rule of life. Wales, as he saw, needed a spiritual revival, more than anything else.

Beginning in the Ministry

Dr Lloyd-Jones began his ministry in South Wales in the For-

ward Movement Mission Church in Sandfields, Aberavon. He aimed to set the minds of his people firmly on the Word of God. He put a stop to the sports club, the drama group and other forms of entertainment which the church had had. His vision was to set the minds of his people on their need for the new birth and the godly life. His first sermon, delivered in 1926, was on: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:2) These words are now on his tombstone in Wales.

By the grace of God his ministry was soon richly blessed as many people were roused by his preaching and moved to seek salvation through faith in Christ. Three years after his ministry began, there were clear evidences of divine blessing. In 1929 it is said that seventy people professed as new converts. In 1930 it is said that 128 persons professed their faith in Christ. People's lives were being wonderfully changed by the grace of God. A notable case was "Staffordshire Bill", who, previous to his conversion, had been a heavy drinker. But now, as a believer in Christ, he was a radiant Christian.

The excellent preaching of Dr Lloyd-Jones was soon widely known and his ministry sought by people far and near. In 1932 he was called to preach in Canada and New York. In this latter city it is reported that several thousands of people came to hear him.

Dr Lloyd-Jones's influence for good was seen in other ways too. He promoted sound evangelical theology to the international world of students through the work of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (IVF) and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). Over the years young students in many countries came to embrace the truths of the gospel of Christ.

Westminster Chapel

In 1938 Dr Lloyd-Jones was called to be joint minister of Westminster Chapel in London. The senior minister at that date was G. Campbell Morgan, but he retired in 1943 and Dr Lloyd-Jones became sole minister. Here he exercised a very fruitful and active ministry until 1968. In this period of twenty-five years, there was very much blessing. It appears that by 1947 the attendance at Westminster Chapel was most encouraging. It is reported that the morning attendance every Lord's Day averaged 1,500 and the evening attendance 2,000. People were drawn by the powerful preaching of the Word of God. On Friday nights "the Doctor", as they affectionately called him when minister at Westminster Chapel, gave expository sermons on the Epistle to the Romans.

The Wider Ministry

In the good providence of God, Dr Lloyd-Jones made possible the founding of the Banner of Truth Trust in 1957, whose first General Editor was Rev. Iain Murray. At that date Mr Murray was assistant to Dr Lloyd-Jones. Like very many others I personally have, over the years, been greatly helped in my understanding of sound theology by the books and conferences of the Banner.

Dr Lloyd-Jones used his influence in many ways to promote the

gospel and spread the truth of God's Word. He always sought to adhere to biblical principles.

He preached at university missions. He was the first chairman of IFES. He led a ministerial Fraternal for forty years. He chaired an annual Puritan conference.



His Last Days

In 1968 Dr Lloyd-Jones became seriously ill and retired from Westminster Chapel. When he recovered from surgery he devoted much time to the preparation of his sermons for publication as books. In this way his sermons could reach and influence a greater number of people worldwide than had been able to hear him preach in his lifetime. The Lloyd-Jones Recording Trust now report that ten million recordings of his sermons are in circulation. It should be mentioned with appreciation that Mrs Lloyd-Jones took a brief part in the editing of a number of her

husband's books.

Dr Lloyd-Jones clearly saw, very sadly, that many churches were now failing to treat the Bible as God's infallible and inspired Word. He emphasised the need to pray for a true religious revival. "Philosophy and science have dethroned the Bible", he believed. Behind the scene of his ministry there were numbers of earnest, praying Christians who loved his preaching and who had felt the "sense of God" as they listened to his anointed preaching.

In 1979 illness obliged Dr Lloyd-Jones to end his preaching. He reached his 81st birthday in December 1980. In February 1981 he said to his family: "Don't try to hold me back from the glory." He died in his sleep on March 1st 1981. His funeral was at Newcastle Emllyn in Wales and a memorial service was held in London a month later. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13).

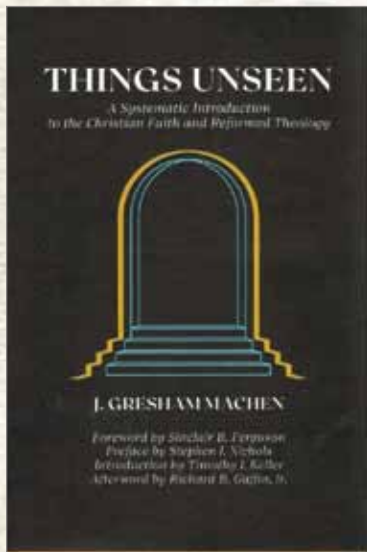
Some recommended books and other resources:

- *Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon* (Banner of Truth) – compelling messages from Lloyd-Jones' early ministry in South Wales.
- *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (IVP) – a rich and searching volume of expository sermons from Westminster Chapel, which would be helpful to read before tackling the longer series on Romans and Ephesians.
- *Preaching and Preachers* (Hodder & Stoughton) – a lively and instructive course of homiletics lectures delivered at Westminster Seminary.
- *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* by Iain H. Murray (Banner of Truth) – the classic two-volume biography.
- *Logic on Fire* – a well-produced DVD giving a good introduction to the Doctor and his preaching ministry. *MLJ Trust* (www.mljtrust.org) – an online library of audio sermons

Rev. M. Roberts is an emeritus pastor of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). This article is taken with permission from the Free Church Witness of March 2021.



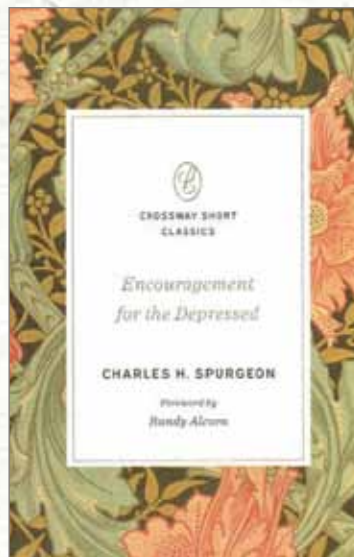
RBS CLASSIC TITLES



Things Unseen: A Systematic Introduction to the Christian Faith and Reformed Theology

By Gresham J. Machen

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) was a professor at Princeton Seminary. He founded Westminster Seminary in 1929 and led the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936. R.C. Sproul said: "The recovery of this work of J. Gresham Machen is not like finding a gold mine in the mountains, it is more like discovering a diamond mine. It is a true treasure—one of sparkling jewels and glorious truth. To mine this treasure is to find a deposit in heaven." Hardcover, 446 pages, Westminster Seminary Press **RBS Price \$48.00**



Encouragement for the Depressed (Crossway Short Classics)

By C. H. Spurgeon

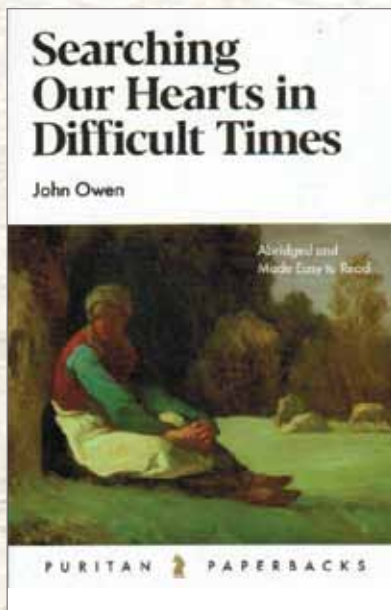
In this classic sermon, Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) gently urges those struggling with depression to cast their burdens upon the Lord, who will not forsake His people. Having battled depression and discouragement for most of his years in ministry, Spurgeon encourages the distressed to hold fast to the promises of God, for He is steadfast and will comfort His children as they walk faithfully with Him. Softcover, 102 pages, Crossway **RBS Price \$11.00**

Searching Our Hearts in Difficult Times (Puritan Paperbacks)

By John Owen

O that we might advise one another as to what to do; to help one another to recover from our weaknesses! Hailed as Britain's greatest theologian, Owen knew that following Jesus is not easy. It involves self-denial, daily cross-bearing, and lifelong obedience. Salvation is promised to the one who 'endures to the end.' Christians need much encouragement, especially in 'difficult times.'

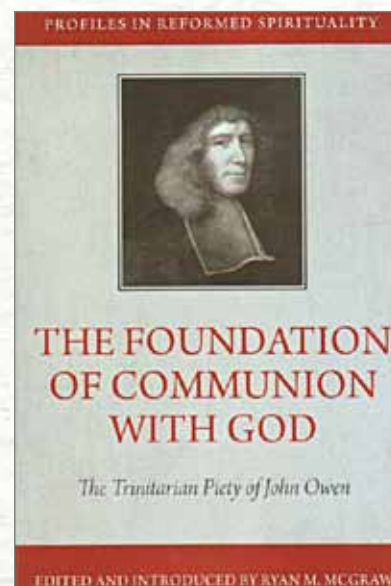
The short chapters in Searching Our Hearts in Difficult Times contain a number of Owen's talks and sermons and are as relevant to Christians today as they were some three and a half centuries ago. Abridged and made easy to read. Softcover, 144 pages, Banner of Truth Trust **RBS Price \$10.50**



The Foundation of Communion With God (Profiles in Reformed Spirituality)

By Ryan M. McGraw

This book introduces readers to the Trinitarian piety of John Owen (1616-1683). Ryan McGraw's introduction to Owen sketches the major events of this important theologian's life and shows how his circumstances shaped his thought on the themes of the Trinity and public worship. The second part of the book presents forty-one brief selections from Owen's writings that trace his thoughts on knowing God as Triune, on Scripture and worship, on heavenly-mindedness, and on covenant and the church. Softcover, 147 pages, Reformation Heritage Books **RBS Price \$10.00**



RBS NEW TITLES



Hope When It Hurts: Biblical Reflections to Help You Grasp God's Purpose in Your Suffering

By Kristen Wetherell & Sarah Walto

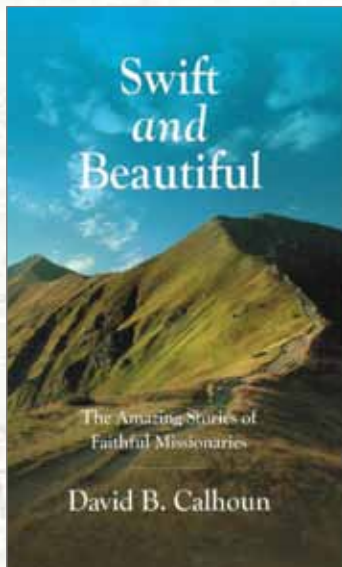
This book contains thirty biblical meditations for women that offer hope in times of suffering. Kristen and Sarah have walked through, and are walking in, difficult times. So these thirty reflections are full of realism about the hurts

of life--yet overwhelmingly full of hope about the God who gives life. Each chapter contains a biblical reflection, with questions and prayers, and a space for journaling. Hardcover, 250 pages, The Good Book Company

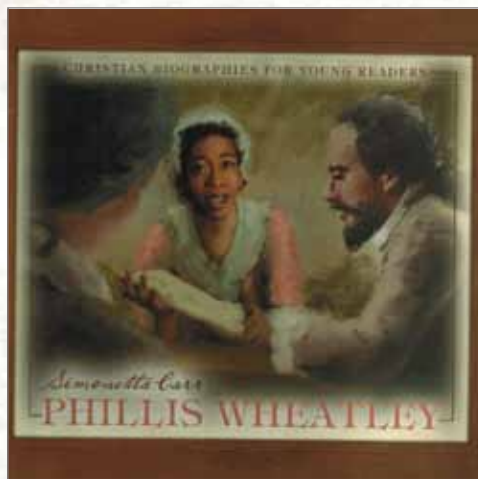
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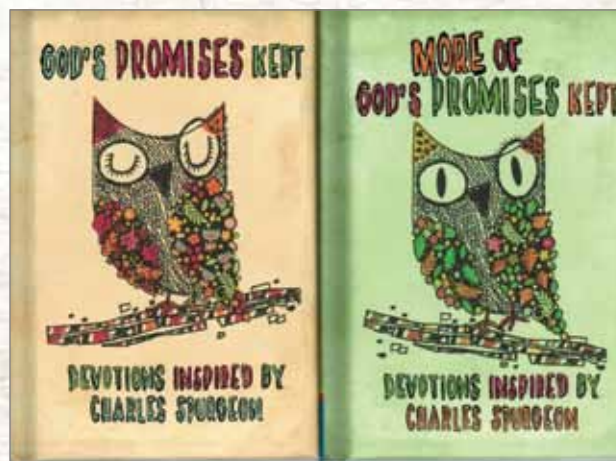
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PILGRIMS AND PURITANS IN AMERICA (6)

SOME OUTSTANDING PURITAN LEADERS IN NEW ENGLAND (3)

THOMAS HOOKER (1)

So far, we have examined two of New England's greatest leaders: John Winthrop, the first and most important governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company, and John Cotton, one of its foremost spiritual leaders. We will now turn to an equally important theologian who came to America to provide spiritual guidance to the new settlers in the colony. Rev. Thomas Hooker's ministry, like Cotton's, was to make a lasting impact on the New England church and society.

Early Life

Thomas Hooker was born in July 1586, in Leicestershire, England. He was admitted to Queen's College in Cambridge in March 1604, at age nineteen. Shortly thereafter, Hooker switched to Emmanuel College, regarded by many as a nursery for Puritans.¹ Upon receiving his BA, he stayed for another ten years as a tutor for theological students. During his tenure, Hooker went through a lengthy conversion experience. After many sessions with an experienced spiritual counselor who tried to encourage him by directing him to Christ and His promises, Hooker was enabled to cling to these promises and was delivered from all his fears and soundly converted. Later, he would say to others who were afflicted with similar fears, "The promise of the gospel was the boat which was to carry a perishing sinner over into the Lord Jesus Christ."²

Shortly after his conversion, Hooker believed God was calling him to preach the gospel. He received a call to a small Anglican church in Esher, England. While there, he was asked to minister to a woman who was deeply depressed, even suicidal, fearing that she had committed the unpardonable sin and would be lost forever. After spending many weeks counseling her, the Lord used Hooker's pastoral care to bring the lady to full assurance of salvation. Years later, Hooker wrote his famous book, *The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn Unto Christ*, based largely on his own experience and that of the woman he had led to faith in Christ.

In 1621, Hooker married Susanna Garbrand, who was the maid of the lady he had ministered to in Esher. In 1628, he became pastor of the church at Essex and his fame as a gospel preacher continued to grow. About this time, William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury and a fierce enemy of the Puritans, began harassing Hooker and other preachers who refused to conform to the new rules for worship in the national church. Laud summoned Hooker to London for an inquiry into his compliance with these rules, which resulted in his being temporarily suspended from the ministry. When Laud summoned him again in 1631, Hooker, sensing the danger of being thrown into prison or worse, fled



with his wife and children to Amsterdam, where many other Puritans were living in exile.

The Dutch government allowed the English refugees to establish their own congregations on the condition that they would adopt the Presbyterian form of church government. Hooker, however, was a convinced Congregationalist, and in good conscience could not become a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church on this condition. After waiting in vain for two years, he sensed that God was calling him to move to New England, as John Winthrop and others had done in 1630. So, in the spring of 1633, Hooker secretly made his way back to England with his wife and family and from there went to America.

Life in New England

Accompanying him on his voyage were two other Puritan preachers with their wives and children, John Cotton and Samuel Stone. They arrived in Boston on September 4, 1633. Many of Hooker's church members from Essex had preceded him to the new world and eagerly awaited their pastor's arrival in Newtown, near Boston.

A year or so later, Hooker, with some members of his congregation, decided to move to the Connecticut River valley because they felt there was not enough land for them and their livestock in the Boston area. However, also other factors were involved in the move to Connecticut, such as disagreements over the voting rights of the settlers. Hooker insisting on a democratic approach, while Cotton championed a more restricted and traditional form. More importantly, there were doctrinal differences between them, which arose out of the so-called Antinomian Controversy associated with a woman, Anne Hutchinson.

The Antinomian Controversy

Previously, I mentioned something about this controversy. Hutchinson, a member of Cotton's church in England, had followed her favourite pastor to New England, together with her husband and brother-in law, Rev. John Wheelright. Although Hutchinson was known and respected as a God-fearing woman, she held certain doctrinal views that raised suspicions within the Puritan community.

These views concerned the question of how Christians can be sure of their salvation. What evidence can a believer produce that will help him or her conclude that he or she is a child of God? Most of the Puritans pointed to a changed life that follows the new birth. They believed that the evidence of justification becomes visible in a life of sanctification. A regenerated believer will strive to keep the commandments of God's law, not keeping them perfectly, but having the beginning of a new obedience that God has begun as a work of grace in them.³

Anne Hutchison and others disagreed with this view and insisted that this kind of reasoning can only lead to the error of legalism. When professing Christians rest on their good works instead of Christ and His finished work, they are deceiving themselves, or as Hutchinson would say, they are still in the covenant of works and not (yet) in the covenant of grace.

According to Ann Hutchinson, the Holy Spirit does not require a believer to obey the law of God, since Christ has already obeyed it for him. She based this on Paul's statement, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). True believers, she said, have a law (the law of love) within them which overrules any external law in the Bible (the Ten Commandments) or any law issued by the state. Thus, a believer is free to act as he or she pleases provided they follow the direction of the Spirit.

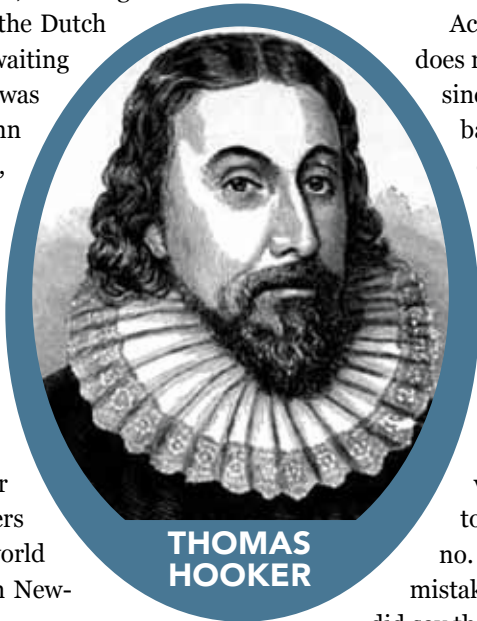
Hutchinson claimed support for her views from her favourite pastor, John Cotton. Was there a basis for her claim? Yes and no. Cotton did teach ideas that could easily be mistaken for Hutchinson's views. For instance, he did say that due to the depravity of our hearts, we can

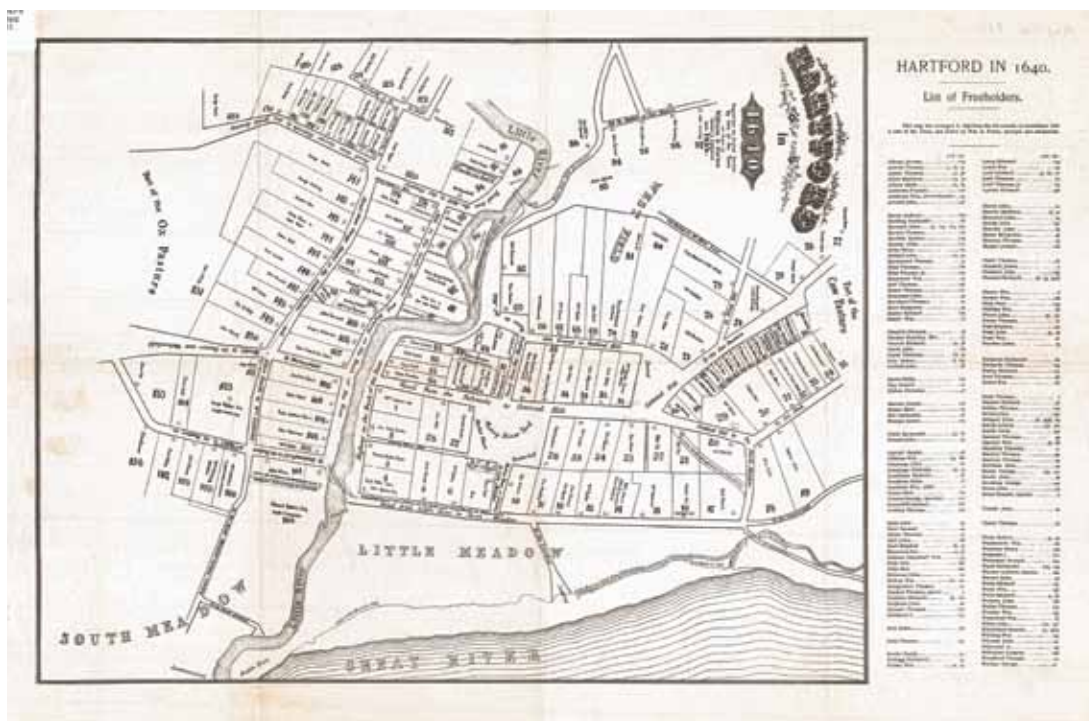
easily be wrong about the nature of good works. They could be the products of common grace rather than saving faith, he warned.

Cotton's teaching on this issue was not always clear, although not wrong *per se*. But when Hutchinson said that believers can experience the blessing of assurance only by the testimony of the Holy Spirit to their heart *apart from the written Word of God*, she crossed the line into heresy. This was pure subjectivism and for that reason unacceptable to all who sat in judgment of her case, including John Cotton. The guilty verdict was unanimous for two reasons: if believers do not need to keep God's law, they are not only in danger of forfeiting their salvation, but they will also cause great harm to society. Winthrop and the other authority figures in the Colony knew that this would lead to general lawlessness in the Bay Colony and undermine the authority of both state and church.

Hooker's Doctrine of Conversion

After Hutchinson was banished to Narragansett, later known as Providence, Rhode Island, Governor Winthrop summoned Thomas Hooker to work through the issues arising from Anne Hutchinson's views. Hooker's involvement was to arbitrate the concerns other ministers had with John Cotton's soteriology (doctrine of salvation). While no one questioned Cotton's basic orthodoxy, he tended to emphasize man's passivity in salvation to such an extent that one might conclude there was nothing man could do but wait for God's Spirit to act. Hooker and the other New England Puritans, however, put more stress on man's re-





LEFT: Hatford map as of 1640.

sponsibility to seek salvation in Christ, by putting away personal sin in order to prepare for Christ to visit him in grace in due time.

Some have concluded from this that Hooker taught that man could do this in his own strength, but this opinion is wrong. Hooker believed that such preparation is the work of the Holy Spirit, who uses the law to convict of sin and thus put sinners in the right frame of mind to receive the Gospel.

Other critics claim that Hooker taught a system of *preparationism* that downplays simple faith in Christ, directing seeking souls to travel to heaven on a narrow and difficult road. He viewed conversion as a long process of soul-searching conviction of sin, giving the impression that unless one had such an experience, his conversion to Christ was suspect.

Although Hooker was a highly skilled expositor of the full range of biblical truth, his overriding concern was to teach people the absolute necessity of conversion as the first stage of saving religion. As David Weir writes,

While still a young preacher in England, Hooker, like all his Puritan colleagues, was very concerned about the low level of spiritual life in the Church of England. They concluded that many in England, perhaps the majority, considered themselves Christians when in fact they were not. These 'experimental Puritans' thought that the problem was not simply church government and liturgy but nominal Christianity.⁴

Hooker understood that the emphasis in his preaching had to be on the conversion of those who thought they were Christians but whose faith at best was like the temporary faith of the stony-ground hearers of Jesus' parable. Bearing in mind that church attendance in England was mandatory and subject to fines and that church discipline was almost non-existent, it should not surprise us that most churchgoers were unconverted. This helps explain

why Hooker's preaching and that of his Puritan colleagues was so searching. As Iain Murray writes:

It is impossible to do any justice to the burden of Hooker's preaching in Essex between 1626-29 without taking this understanding of the state of the people into account. We may disagree with that understanding as many of the anti-Puritan clergy did, believing that it caused men needless scruples and distress, but at least it should be recognized that it throws important light upon the question why Hooker and his brethren preached as they did. They

meant to trouble men's consciences; they meant to shake their empty assurance; and they persisted in it with much personal cost.⁵

To be continued.

Endnotes

- 1 Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 351.
- 2 Cotton Mather, *Great Works of Christ in America*, vol. 1: 334.
- 3 Cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, ch. XVI, art. 2; *Heidelberg Catechism*, L.D. 24, 32, 44.
- 4 David Weir, *Early New England*, 20.
- 5 Iain Murray, "Thomas Hooker and the Doctrine of Conversion," *Banner of Truth*, no.196 (Jan. 1980): 24.



F. E. Church 1846-Hooker and Company Journeying from Plymouth to Hartford in 1636.

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ORDINATION INSTALLATION INAUGURATION

Rev. Ben Van Liere

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us.” 2 Corinthians 4: 7



“And I brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 2: 1 – 5

These two scriptures were opened to the Free Reformed Church of Langley as we witnessed the ordination, installation, and inauguration of our fourth pastor — Rev. Ben Van Liere. On Good Friday, April 2, 2021, our God in grace and mercy, after several years of vacancy, blessed us with the induction of a new pastor. This was the first ordination held in our congregation and a very moving service for us all.

Pastor Pieter VanderMeyden’s theme, “Golden Treasure in Earthen Vessels,” opened the Scriptures to us in a word of encouragement: our God is a surprising God who uses the weakest of men to exalt His name. The gospel is a precious treasure

which God places in that same dust from which He first made man, weak and even contemptible. What a dignity this gives to the office of minister of the gospel. In this, the power of God is revealed in the ministry: for the effectiveness of the vessel is by God alone in the exaltation of Christ, who, in His humiliation, is the ultimate Treasure in an earthen vessel.

While Pastor Ben Van Liere knelt, five other pastors joined Pastor VanderMeyden in laying their hands with him in the ordination to service: pastors Tom Aicken, John Koopman, Jack Schoeman, Martin Slingerland, and John Procee.

The theme of the sermon in which Pastor Ben Van Liere inaugurated his ministry among us was “The Gospel Message Proclaimed.” In these challenging times, the opposition from without as well as within comes in many pressures and temptations. Do they tempt us to conform to the world or are they means to transform us into the image of God? Despite all the challenges, the message of the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel, stands unchanged. Christ crucified is the display of God’s glory and love and the one through whom grace flows to sinners. This message, the mystery of God, is revealed in the hearts of sinners by the Holy Spirit. When it is, we love God because He

first loved us.

The service ended with the several addresses to the newly ordained minister. The chairman of consistory, elder Pete Pretorius, called upon Rev. Tom Aicken (our emeritus pastor), Rev. Jack Schoeman (our counsellor), Rev. John Koopman, and Rev. Martin Slingerland to share words of welcome and encouragement. Elder Pretorius then asked Ingrid, Pastor Van Liere's wife, to come forward to join her husband. He welcomed them and their five children to our congregation and presented them with an album with pictures of the families of the congregation. This was the only way we could introduce ourselves to them, as the restrictions of Covid-19 prevented all but a very few from attending the service in person.

Our new pastor, Ben Van Liere, is a graduate of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was raised in southern Alberta, and, prior to his call to the ministry, worked as a Professional Engineer in Manitoba and Alberta. After meeting Ingrid in Manitoba, they were married in 2009 and have been blessed with five children: Annabelle, Tobin, Josiah, Raelynn, and Kinsley.



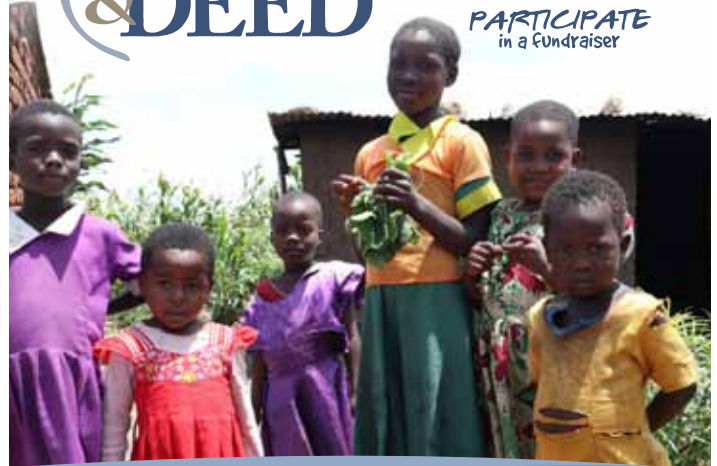
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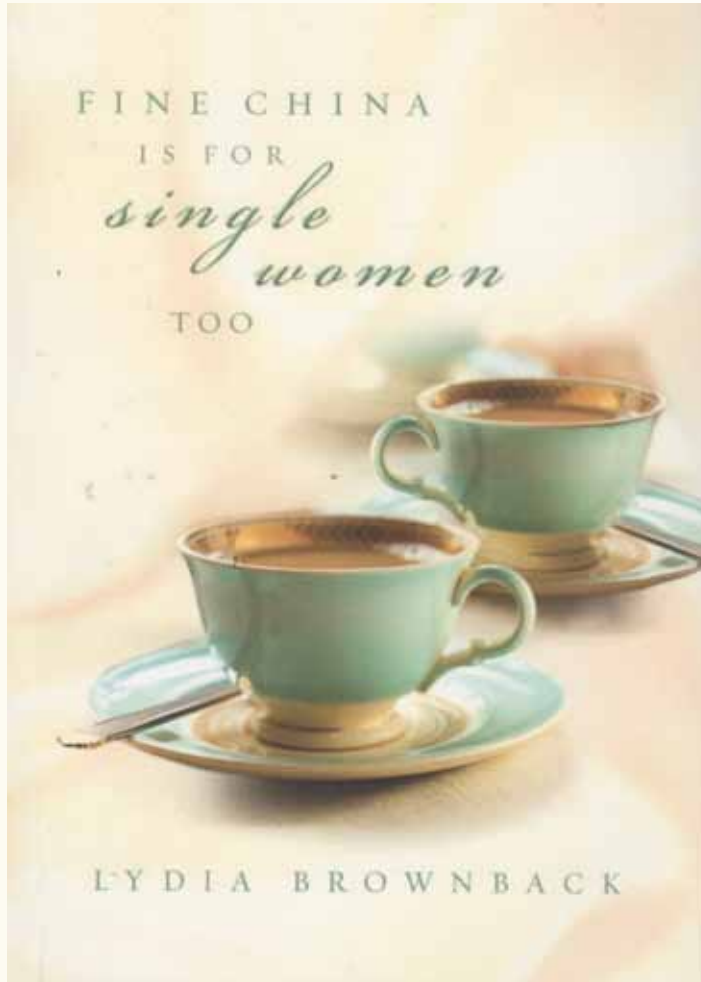


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SINGLENESS IN THE BIBLE

FINE CHINA IS FOR SINGLE WOMEN TOO by Lydia Brownback. Published by P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 2003. Softcover, 121 pages.



“Why is it that only women on the brink of marriage get showered with household appliances, fine china, and Waterford crystal?” is the question raised by the author in the Introduction. In other words, why don’t single women get a housewarming party when they start their own home? Some of them probably do – and I hope they do – but that is not what this book is about. It is not intended to make single women covet what they are missing in life or raise guilt with those who may ignore or pity them. The title is intended to show singles that the Lord can take their singleness and make it beautiful like fine china (Epilogue).

Lydia Brownback is unmarried and addresses topics that these women often struggle with, basing her answers solidly on Scripture and filling in with snippets of her own experience. She does not hide that most women long for the companionship of marriage and fulfillment of their maternal yearnings.

God created the bond of marriage and children, indicating that the sexual element in this relation is nothing to be ashamed of. “In fact, God uses this desire for sex as a means of bringing a man and a woman together” (p. 4). Yet, the only legitimate means for realizing this aspect of our nature is meant for the marriage relationship. Therefore, the majority of Christian women do not choose to be single, and they often ask themselves, why am I single? Lydia Brownback’s answer is: “each and every one of us is alone because, for today at least, God has ordained it” (p.5).

“Longing for what God has not given, or has not given yet, is not only reasonable and understandable, it can also be constructive as a means to draw us to cling more closely to the One who created us to hunger in this way” (p. 5). The rest of the chapter deals with coming to terms with what God has ordained. Logically, this first chapter is followed by the subject of God’s Sovereignty. Again, she asserts that “the marital status of each of God’s daughters is divinely decreed” (p. 10). Lest this sound harsh, she goes on to explain that everything God does is governed by His goodness, love, mercy, grace, and His desire to conform us to Jesus Christ. “It is all for our blessing” (p. 12). God wants us to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever, whether single or married. This also applies to women who are widowed or single in some other way (p. 16).

Brownback shows that this is not accepted without struggles. “God isn’t asking you to crush your desire. He is merely asking you to cling to him in the midst of it” (p. 22). Throughout the book, she encourages the reader: “If you trust in the true God, you can know that, one way or another, he will utterly fulfil every desire you have” (p. 30). There are actions singles can take “by cultivating a right view of reality,” such as dealing with envy, submission, the expectations of society and culture, and being aware of the danger of making wrong choices to escape the single status. A whole chapter is devoted to show that there are advantages to the single state which require thankfulness, most of all because “we know from Scripture that it is God’s goodness that leads us to the repentance he commands from us” (p. 66).

In the chapter “Day by Day,” she points out the blessings of living a life that is goal-oriented by using our talents and the state of singleness to serve the Lord. Singles often are given great opportunities and she points to the parable of the man distributing his goods to his servants before going on a journey, giving each of them talents, which one of them squandered (Matt.25:21,23). “Ask God to show you how he wants to

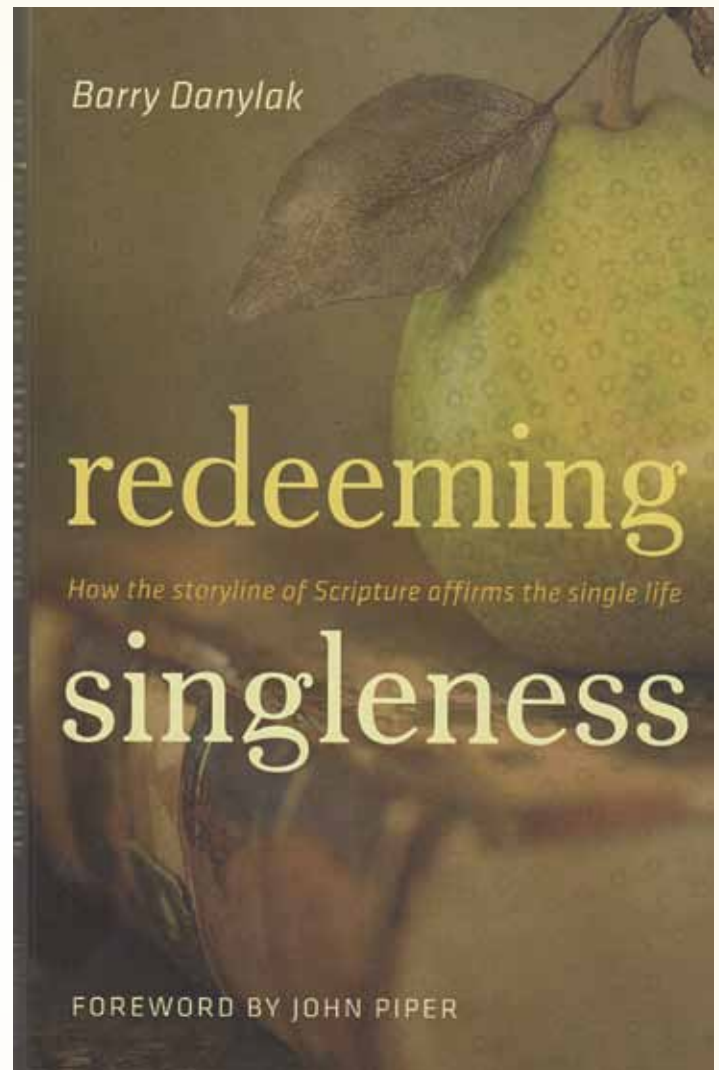
use you in his service in a way that would not be possible if you were married” (p. 82). Here she confesses that when she was in her early thirties and she lost all her single friends to marriage, she “hit rock-bottom, discontent with my single status” and began praying in earnest for God to show her what to do (p. 82). He led her to continue her studies and become a writer and editor, serving several well-known Presbyterian ministers, including the radio ministry of the late James Montgomery Boice of Tenth Presbyterian Church. Of course, not every single is able to do what she is doing, but everyone has a talent. It may be serving as a school teacher, church secretary, or treasurer, teaching Sunday school, or befriending shut-ins and lending a helping hand to busy moms.

Perhaps not everyone will be able to come to the conclusion that “being set apart for singleness is a privilege” (p. 87), as the author states, but it is most important to become content with our God-ordained status. This contentment is something that even the apostle Paul had to learn (Phil. 4:11-13), and often comes after great struggles. In response to Paul’s request for his painful thorn in the flesh to be removed, God’s answer was: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). This is learned by setting our heart on Jesus Christ. “Only God and fellowship with him can satisfy the human heart and fulfill all desire. So if we seek it there we will never be disappointed” (p. 108).

This is a wonderfully uplifting and easy to read little book, full of Gospel and practical encouragement. It also has discussion questions with every chapter. Highly recommended, not just for singles, but for every church member.

REDEEMING SINGLENESSE, How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life by Barry Danylak. Published by Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2010, 256 pages.

Before reading Lydia Brownback’s book, I was looking for a “handle” on what Scripture teaches about singleness. A book review in the Dutch *Reformatisch Dagblad*, a conservative Christian daily by Rev. W. Pieters caught my interest when I googled the title of this book. Pieters highly recommends it for



the biblical and persuasive standpoint that marriage is not the only calling for Christians. A life-long or a temporary period of singleness is a gift of grace which no less can be a fulfillment for serving the Lord, instead of marriage.

Painstakingly, Danylak traces the story line of Scripture, beginning with the marriage of Adam and Eve and the promise of salvation through the Seed. He continues with the promises made to Abraham, the formation of the people of Israel in the

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BOOK REVIEW (Continued)

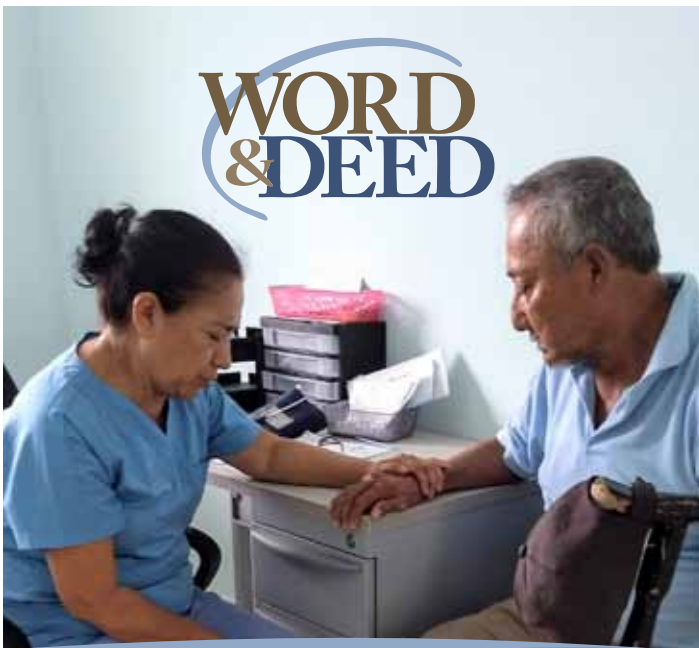
desert, their conquest and occupation of the promised land, the renewal and confirmation of God's promises to king David, and through the prophets. This long line of God's promises is fulfilled in the coming of the promised Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Until this time, marriage was God's primary vehicle to obtain and maintain the covenantal line through the nation of Israel. A woman's barrenness (infertility) was lamented and males who were unable to procreate (eunuchs) were seen as incomplete persons and shut out of certain positions (Deut.23:1). However, the levirate marriage assured that no one would be blotted out of the covenant line or lack an inheritance in the land.

This changed significantly with the coming into the flesh of the Saviour. The Gospels record some surprising statements of our Lord on singleness and marriage. When questioned on divorce, He affirmed the permanence of marriage and denounced divorce, drawing the comment from His disciples that then it is better not to marry. Jesus' answer is surprising: "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." (Matt. 19:12). Later, in reply to the Sadducees' question about multiple marriages in heaven, He rebuked them for not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. The marriage relationship is a temporary, earthly relationship., "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt.22:30).

This amazing statement, which was so difficult to grasp for the Jews, is elaborated by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7, where he affirms the bond of marriage but also states that those who are unmarried have several advantages, mostly to be able to serve without the inevitable encumbrances of married life (vv. 32-35). This is significant, and explains that Jesus, who became like man except for sin and experienced all the trials of human life, including loneliness, never married. Paul too was single in his apostleship.

The implication is that, by Christ's coming into the flesh, the importance of the Jewish lineage and ties to the land of Israel gain a new spiritual perspective. Marriage and family relationships continue as from the beginning and are not abrogated, but there is a new and more important relationship, that is the relationship with God and the family of God (all believers). Jesus indicates this in His answer to His mother and brothers when they interrupted His ministry. His response was: "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and my mother." (Mark 3:34-35). In the post-Pentecost era of the in-gathering of a world-wide church, singles have a new and prominent standing, and they can have important



And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Colossians 3:17

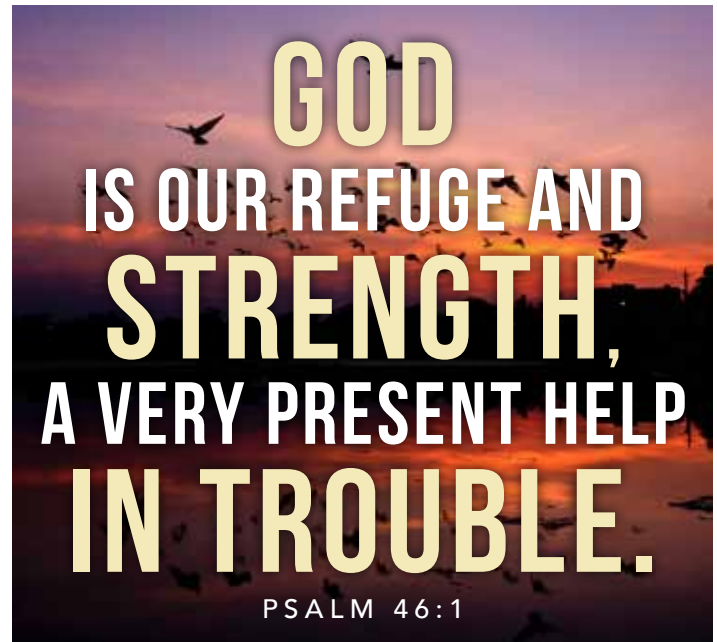
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tasks in promoting God's kingdom. That the first convert was an Ethiopian eunuch is not without significance.

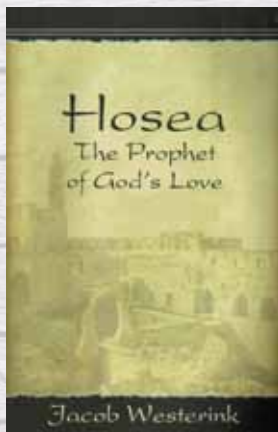
Much more could be said on this somewhat neglected subject. Many spiritual and practical lessons can be drawn from the New Testament's teaching on singleness. A start would be to read this book, which is really a "theology" of singleness. It is not an easy read and is very comprehensive, even repetitive, but by following the storyline throughout both the Old and New Testament on the position of singles, one will gain a new and clearer view of how to value singleness, especially in the church family.

Highly recommended, especially for ministers and Bible students. 🍎

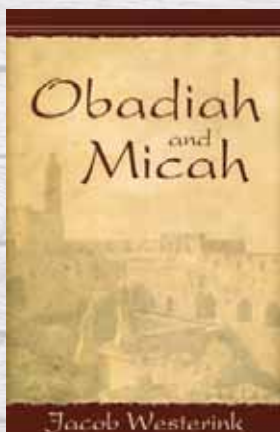
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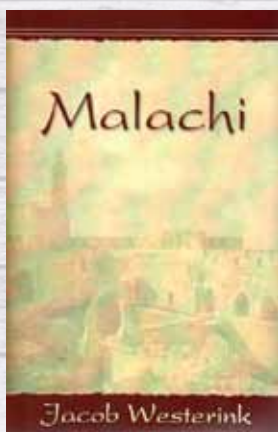
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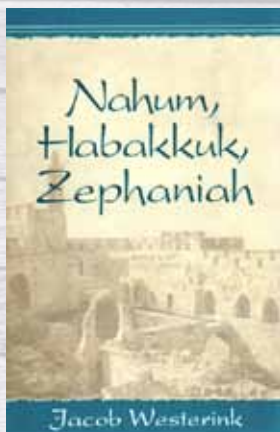
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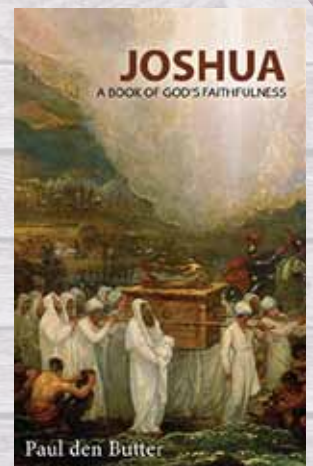


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May 12, 1961

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