

# COUNSEL

## THE STORM

PSALM SIXTEEN IN LIGHT OF GETHSEMANE

FAITHFUL FRIENDS & FINAL WORDS (1 COR. 16:15-24)

LIVING ON EARTH BUT SUSTAINED BY HEAVEN

BEHOLD THE THRONE OF GRACE

HEZEKIAH (PART 6)

GOD AT WORK

TRIALS

*September—December 2007*

**W**ater can be therapeutic. Who has not sat by the shore listening to the gently lapping waves and drifted off to sleep? Or who has not watched a lake calm and clear almost like glass and be soothed by its tranquility? And yet, that same body of water can, under certain circumstances, be whipped up into relentless turmoil and be transformed into a scene of violence with crashing waves in merciless force. It can be a terror to those on the water and even to those nearby.

A storm is a picture of life's storms. Life's circumstances can change, sometimes in a moment, from calm and ease to terror and turmoil. It may take us by surprise, but it is a fact of life for everyone. No one is exempt, including believers. Sooner or later we all run into a storm.

But for the Christian the storms of life are not by chance. The 107th Psalm invites us to observe and understand *"the lovingkindness of the Lord."* (Ps. 107:43). The psalmist finds great comfort in the fact that behind the storm is God—a God of lovingkindness.

Compare these words from the Psalm: *"For He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, Which lifteth up the waves thereof"* (v. 25). *"He maketh the storm a calm, So that the waves thereof are still"* (v. 29). He commands the storm and He makes the calm.

God has a pattern of doing things in storms. Take the example of Jonah, when Jonah found himself in a storm because of his disobedience in running from God. Yet God commanded the storm and made a calm

and in so doing restored His servant to a vital ministry.

Or consider the account in the Gospels of the disciples finding themselves in the storm. You can find the account in Matthew 14, Mark 6 and John 6. It is worth reading each of the accounts. Peter learned to step out in faith. The story is so human and practical. His venture in faith was full of human failure. Acting in faith is not so easy. There are always tendencies to look at the storm and doing so we can be overwhelmed. But the Lord knows that and will be quick to rescue us.

We also notice the disciples' fear was unfounded. That which filled them with dread turned out to be the Lord Himself. *"It is I"* You may have an 'it' today. Could 'it' be the Lord's working? You may be surprised. The Lord works in the storm.

Paul found himself in a storm. In the middle of the Lord's guidance Paul was in a storm. He was there through no fault of his own, but because of others. It was terrifying. And yet God overruled it all and caused great things to happen because of the storm.

Storms can come through our own foolishness. They can come through the disobedience of others. And they can come through no apparent fault of anybody. And yet the believer can trust that the Lord allows the storm so much so that the Psalmist tells us He commands it. The believer's confidence is that God will bring the storm to an end in His own time when it has accom-

plished its purpose. This should relieve us of fear and anxiety over our storms. This should preserve us from mourning what appears to be a loss in the storm. This should move us to prayer during the storm. He hears the cry from those in the storm (Ps. 107:28).

William Cowper wrote these words:

The Lord moves in  
mysterious ways,  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps  
in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up His  
bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh  
courage take!  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy; and  
shall break  
In blessing on your head.

Judge not the Lord by  
feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
His hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

We cannot fight a storm, but we can ride it out. God will cause my storm to cease in His own time. My duty is to trust His lovingkindness. He will never fail.

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**Brian Gunning**  
St. Catharines, Ontario



# COUNSEL

TIMELY TRUTHS FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Volume 37 • Number 5

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**Postmaster:**

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St. Catharines ON  
L2R 6V9

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**Purpose:**

To present truth in words easy to be understood; to bring the Word of God to bear on the confusion of thought that exists in many places today regarding the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, His assembly, His purposes, His people, their privileges and responsibilities Godward and manward. To give a variety of ministry by edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3).

**Price:**

COUNSEL is supported by those who appreciate the aims and ministry of this work. It is sent freely on request, as the Lord enables. All funds received are used entirely to produce and mail the magazine. No salaries, gifts, honorariums, nor expenses are paid to any of the committee or contributing writers. We are thankful to those who feel their responsibility in this ministry and express their appreciation by practical support.

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*Printed in Canada*

**Canadian & overseas donors:**

COUNSEL  
P. O. Box 427  
St. Catharines, ON  
Canada  
L2R 6V9

**U. S. donors:**

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P.O. Box 955  
Kirkland, WA  
98083-0955  
USA

**U. K. and Ireland donors:**

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Cheques from U.K. donors make payable to 'Counsel Magazine'

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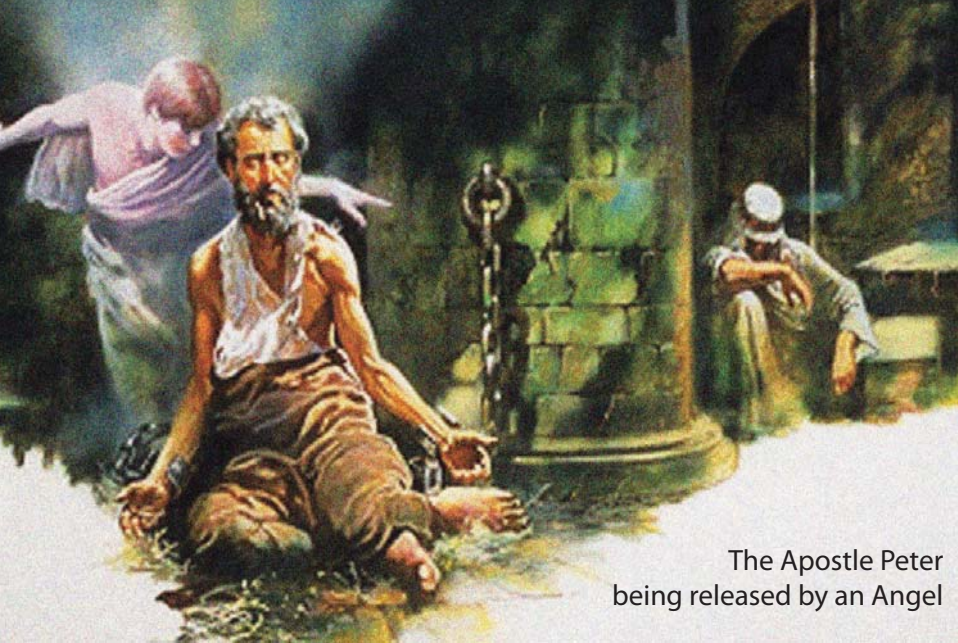
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The Apostle Peter being released by an Angel

# God at Work

## The Imprisonment and Release of the Apostle Peter (Acts 12)

The account of Peter's imprisonment under King Herod and his subsequent release through an angel of the Lord (Acts 12) is not only a dramatic example of what God can do in the life of a Christian, but also a powerful example of what He can do in the life of a non-Christian as well. Cast into prison along with James for his unswerving witness for Christ, Peter now became the prime target of Herod whose hope was to quash this new movement of faith. Herod promptly executed James with the sword—a fulfillment of the very words of Christ that he would indeed drink of the same cup from which the Lord drank (Matt. 20:22-23). Then, seeing that his harassment of the church pleased the Jews and that it could work to his political advantage, he then made plans to execute Peter as soon as the Passover celebration was finished. It

is ironic that there can be such a meticulous adherence to religious law while at the same time persecuting God's true servants, yet it underscores the truth of the Lord's words when he said in John 16:2-3, "...yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto

you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me." Christians should not be surprised when persecution comes; it issues out of intense hatred for God. It is also interesting to note how God allowed James, one of his choice servants, to suffer martyrdom while on the other hand

He allowed Peter to carry on. Why God allows events to happen as they do is indeed an enigma to us—at least for now until that Day comes when we shall know even as we are also known (1 Cor. 13:12). Regardless, the work of God marches forward despite its apparent setbacks.

While in prison, Peter was bound with chains and guarded by four squads of soldiers who prevented his release. But amazingly on the night before he was to be executed, he was fast asleep! How could this be? How could Peter be sleeping when his execution was so near? One reason might have been due to the fact that constant prayer was offered on his behalf by the church (v. 5). If so, it is a clear reminder that believers (both individually and corporately) should be interceding for one another, especially during times of adversity. Little do we realize the private effect that our fervent prayer for others will have upon their hearts and minds, and vice versa. The fact that many were gathered together for prayer (v. 12) certainly contributed to Peter's rest and ultimate release, but is also a sad rebuke to this present generation.

Perhaps Peter was sleeping because he was acting upon Scripture,

### **Christians should not be surprised when persecution comes; it issues out of intense hatred for God**

which promises perfect peace to those whose mind is stayed upon the Lord (Isaiah 26:3). In effect, he could have been doing exactly what the apostle Paul would later urge the Philippian believers to do: to make their requests known unto God in order to have the peace that passes

all understanding (Phil. 4:7). After all, the words of Christ were probably still fresh in his mind when He prophesied to him just weeks before that he would not die until he was

him. To delay would have complicated matters, to say the least. But Peter moved promptly through the door that God had opened. Only God can cause fetters to fall and

thankfully there are those who even though they stand alone are nevertheless persistent and persuasive in acknowledging and declaring the powerful work that God can do. What a challenge to us who so easily accept our difficult circumstances as they are and fail to “step out” of our difficult surroundings to follow the Lord by faith as a testimony to His people. George Mueller did in a previous generation and so can we.

But apart from the practical lessons that this episode in Peter’s experience provides the Christian, there is another equally powerful lesson that this portion contains in the gospel. It offers tremendous encouragement to us as we pray for the salvation of our acquaintances, friends, and loved ones who are spiritually bound and held in the grip of sin. It portrays the way in which the light of Christ can overcome sin’s

## **A pertinent reminder to all of us of our need to wait upon the Lord and rest quietly in Him despite the despairing circumstances that may surround us.**

old (John 21:18). This could have easily given Peter the confidence that he had many years to live and that the Lord would surely intervene before daybreak. Whatever the reason, Peter sleeping in prison during his imprisonment and imminent execution is a superb example of trusting in the promises of God and a pertinent reminder to all of us of our need to wait upon the Lord and rest quietly in Him despite the despairing circumstances that may surround us.

But not only are the events of Acts 12 a lesson of trust in the midst of difficulty, it is also a lesson of God opening doors in response to prayer and clearing the way through seemingly impossible barriers, despite our doubt and unbelief. When Peter was at the extremity of his circumstances, God was just beginning to work. It has been well-stated: “God moves behind the scenes and moves the scenes that He’s behind”—and move the scenes He did. When the time was right, when all hope was gone and when circumstances looked the bleakest, that was the time when chains started dropping and doors started opening. An angel dispatched from heaven exhorted Peter to arise quickly and to follow

doors to open—it is up to us to do the rest, acting quickly and obediently. In our walk with the Lord, there may be times when our backs are against the wall and the only deliverance from our situation will be when in His time He clears a prescribed path that we must walk in without delay.

## **It seemed as if there was no way possible that he would ever be freed from his hopeless predicament.**

Further miracles ensued as the iron gate that led to the city opened of its own accord. Peter could hardly believe what was happening (v. 9) and neither will we when God begins to work! And where was Peter being directed? He was being led to meet with the Lord’s people—to the place where they were gathered together, praying diligently for his release. At first, they too could hardly believe what God had done (vv. 14-15), but Peter kept on knocking, undeterred by the spiritual sluggishness of these “unbelieving believers”! How is it that God’s people so often require extra convincing when He is so clearly working? But

darkness to free a person from their spiritual imprisonment, direct their steps to a fellowship of genuine believers and enable them to testify of the power of God to save. To be sure, Peter was an ardent follower of the Lord Jesus; but the process by which he was miraculously delivered from Herod’s grip aptly depicts the power of Christ to save. Peter was under the sentence of death, imprisoned, bound by chains, and watched over continually by four sets of guards. It seemed as if there was no way possible that he would ever be freed from his hopeless predicament. Yet there was—through One sent from heaven was the Light of God. That Light

## **A lesson of God opening doors in response to prayer and clearing the way through seemingly impossible barriers, despite our doubt and unbelief**

which illumined Peter's darkened dungeon (yet strangely remained unnoticed by all the other prisoners and guards), is the same Light that shines in hearts even today "to give the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). It exposes a person's ominous surroundings, stirs them out of their slumber and brightens their path, causing them to immediately arise and leave their desperate situation to join in the fellowship of His people. Charles Wesley captured it well in his immortal

hymn "And Can It Be":

*"Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee."*

Even God's people may not believe at first, as was the case with Saul of Tarsus when news of his conversion came to the Lord's people (Acts 9:21).

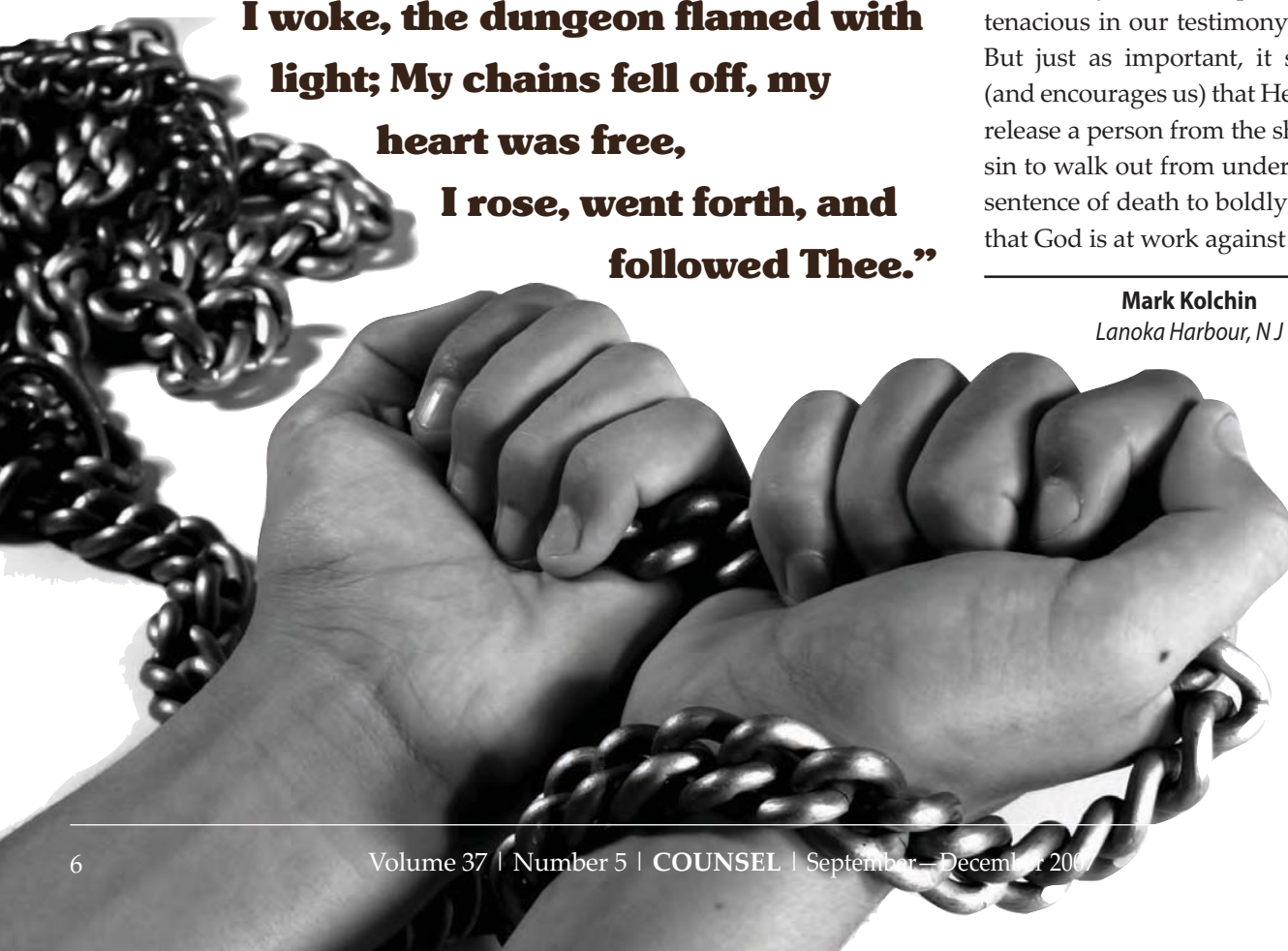
**"Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee."**

But in time, the persistent testimony of genuine conversion will prevail. Not only will a new Christian prove his faith by his actions, but he will prove it by his words also. "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so" (Ps. 107:2). So fellow Christian, don't despair! Keep praying for that friend, that neighbor, that family member who seems so unreachable and whose circumstances seem so impenetrable. Your constant, fervent prayer for them in time could make all the difference in their lives.

Yes, there are many gospel parallels in this passage as well as practical reminders also for younger and older believers alike. It helps us to see that God allows some believers like James to suffer when others are spared; how the church needs to be in constant prayer and dependence upon the Lord, especially in times of adversity; how we need to acknowledge that God can and does respond to the prayer of His people as they call upon Him, and at times if need be, we may have to be persistent and tenacious in our testimony for Him. But just as important, it shows us (and encourages us) that He is able to release a person from the shackles of sin to walk out from underneath the sentence of death to boldly proclaim that God is at work against all odds.

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**Mark Kolchin**  
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# Behold The Throne of Grace

Behold the throne of grace!  
The promise calls us near!  
To seek our God and Father's face,  
Who loves to answer prayer.

That rich atoning blood,  
Which sprinkled 'round we see,  
Provides for those who come to God  
An all prevailing plea.

My soul, ask what thou wilt,  
Thou canst not be too bold:  
Since His own blood for thee was spilt,  
What else can He withhold?

Beyond our utmost wants  
His love and power can bless:  
To praying souls He always grants  
More than they can express

Since 'tis the Lord's command,  
Our mouth we'll open wide:  
Lord, open Thou Thy bounteous hand,  
That we may be supplied.

—John Newton



# LIVING ON EARTH BUT SUSTAINED BY HEAVEN

**I**n the life of Christ Jesus we observe a life lived on earth but sustained and directed from above. Every decision, action and ministry was from the Father in heaven and thus perfectly expressed Him (John 5:17, 19, 30).

## The Two Works of God

Christ is the Savior of our soul. He is also the builder of His church into His image. One is based on the finished work of Christ on the cross. The other is the unfinished work of Christ as Head of the body, the church. His body is growing as a holy temple on earth into the Head who is in heaven. This is now being accomplished by Christ's high priestly intercession to forgive and give grace to help in time of need. Also His Spirit, who inwardly changes one into His glorious image, His wisdom and authority to and over His body, are the sources of this growth.

When it comes to salvation, the evangelical mindset recoils at interjecting any performance man must contribute to the death of Christ to secure our salvation from the judgment due our sins. This is good and scriptural. The gospel claims that salvation is not by works of righteousness which we have done (Tit. 3:5). Acts 15 and Galatians teach that to add anything one must do to faith in Christ to obtain salvation is accused by God (Gal. 1:8).

However, in the Lord's work of building His church, great liberties

are taken. There is much in the way of man's inventions and imagination that's interjected beyond the Head's directive in holy Scriptures to help develop Christians.

It might be helpful to review the Head's role and the believer's role as revealed in Scripture. For the body of Christ is a unique entity on earth today that is to be sustained by its Head in heaven. This is unlike the world but is like Christ when He was on earth.

## The work of the Head and our simple responsibility is revealed as follows:

**1** He grows His church by adding daily such as should be saved for He gives the increase (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 3). We are to simply believe on Him to be saved (Acts 16:31).

**2** He has chosen to save by the simple method of preaching (1 Cor. 1:21). We are to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2).

**3** He guides the areas of ministry for His servants (Acts 16). We are to obey that guidance according to His Word (John 14:15).

**4** He engifts His believers with spiritual abilities (by His choice) which enables them to serve (Eph. 4, 1 Cor. 12). We are to simply think through what our gifts are and use them (Rom. 12:3).

**5** He wrote a book of instruction that is all sufficient to equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15-17). We are to read, listen and obey the book (1 Tim. 4:12-16).

**6** He has the wisdom and understanding to enable us do to His will (Col. 1:9-11; 2:3). We are to ask and seek His wisdom and pray for one another in this (Col. 1:9; Jas. 1:5).

**7** He has specifically ordained the gathering of His church as His way to learn and be built up (1 Cor. 14). We simply are to gather together and acknowledge His commandments in the church meeting (1 Cor. 14:37).

**8** He opens doors, hearts and minds (Luke 24:45; Acts 16:14; Rev. 3:7-8). We are to simply pray for open doors, minds and hearts (Eph. 1:16-18; 3:14-21; Col. 4:3).

**9** He makes overseers (elders) through His Spirit (Acts 20:28). We are to simply recognize and esteem them by submitting to those elders who shepherd (protect and guide) the church of God. (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

**10** His Spirit overcomes indwelling sin before it becomes deeds: lust, anger, jealousy, drunkenness, etc. (Gal. 5:16). We are to walk in the Spirit and put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit. (Rom. 8:13).

**11** His Spirit produces character change: love, joy, peace, meekness, self control, etc. (Gal. 5:22-23). We are to live in the Spirit and behold the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18).

**12** His Spirit reveals the deep things of God to a believer (1 Cor. 2:10). We are to look to Him rather than the wisdom of this world as we rightly divide the word of truth. (1 Cor. 2; 2 Tim. 2:15).

**13** His Spirit sheds the love of God in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). When we believe the gospel and are saved, this happens (Rom. 5:1-5).

**14** He supplies the physical needs of His church (Phil. 4:19). We are to work honestly with our own hands and be sensitive to the Head's leading and use our material gain He has given us to help others (1 Thess. 4; 2 Cor. 9).

**15** He instructs the assembly in how to function so that all can learn and be comforted (1 Cor. 14:31,37). We are to simply submit and do His instruction and allow others that freedom also (1 Cor. 1:10).

**16** He supplies peace to keep the mind and heart during trials (Phil. 4:6-7; Isa. 26:3). We are to be anxious for nothing and let our requests be known to Him (Phil. 4:6).

**17** He intercedes as High Priest to forgive our sins and remove debilitating guilt (Heb. 9:14). We are to simply confess our sins to Him (1 Jn. 1:9).

**18** He intercedes as High Priest to help in the pressures of

life (Heb. 4:14-16). We are to simply come to His throne of grace by faith (Heb. 4:16).

**19** He corrects whom He loves to produce righteous living (Heb. 12:11). We are to be exercised (aware and learn) of what He is doing (Heb. 12:11).

**20** He puts down and lifts up (1 Sam. 2:7). We simply trust Him in this and accept our calling (1 Cor. 7:20-24).

**21** He maketh poor and maketh rich (1 Sam. 2:7). We are to be content with what we have (1 Tim. 6:8).

**22** He gives armour (power) to completely withstand spiritual enemies (Eph. 6:13). We are simply to actively put on His armour (Eph. 6:11).

**23** He gives us advance information (prophecy) to give us hope that sustains (John 14:29). We are to read the prophecy and keep it (Rev. 1:3).

**24** He rules in the kingdom of men and puts into office whom He will (Dan. 4:17). We are to simply pay, pray and obey (Rom. 13; 1 Tim. 2:1-2).

**25** He will change the world politically, environmentally and socially when He comes to establish His kingdom on earth (Rev. 11:15). We are to simply wait for His coming when He will make things right (1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:6-10).

As we look around today at modern thinking in the western church we see the addition of hundreds of things to the Head's instruction

in Scripture to cause His church to "grow". Colossians addresses a similar problem with the words "not holding the Head" by being taken up with the philosophy of man. Today's philosophies have taken the form of worship teams and worship leaders

- trained clerical pastors over laity
- drug therapy and psychological counseling to redirect the mind for behavior change
- training and schooling programs to produce effective spiritual leaders
- drama and music to be relevant to the "unchurched"
- marketing programs to raise funds
- organizations not built on the gospel alone to enhance evangelism, produce better fathers, families and spouses
- and Christian political coalitions to change our world
- and on and on it goes.

While we are not questioning the motives or love for the Lord and care for His people we must ask how the Lord views the interjection of the hand of man between Him and the government of His children? We are not talking about the interjection of man in the salvation of God's people. But we are talking about the interjecting of man's ways in the ruling of God's people for their spiritual welfare, growth and service—something else placed between the head and the body.

The lessons of first Samuel answer this question. Israel requested not a different sacrifice for sins but a change of government; a king to reign over them like all the nations. The catalyst for the idea was the failure of God's people (8:3). The idea for the new addition of man came from looking around; what everybody else was doing (they did not look up to God nor to His Word, 8:5). The goal of the idea was for a



man to “fight our battles” (8:20). Here His people do not reject the redemption of God but the rule of God over them; “for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them,” (1 Sam. 8:7).

This request for a king to rule (judge) them and fight their battles for them is called wickedness in 1 Samuel 12:17, 20. Why is such a thing of changing God’s government over

ods for he had a higher agenda in His foresight (7:2).

5. The people often failed but God still had His place among them. (20-21).

**1 Samuel 8—31**

**When man was the governing king**

1. A king is an organized hierarchy where man replaces God’s direct involvement (8:10-18).

force His rule and ways on His people. How does one legislate love and submission from the heart? However, God would allow them to experience the consequences of their choices (31:1-7). Years later He would tell an apostate nation that they destroyed themselves in asking for a king when He was their king (head) and help. Thus they angered God (Hosea 13:9-11).

**For the body of Christ is that unique entity on earth today that is to be sustained by its Head in heaven. This is unlike the world but is like Christ when He was on earth.**

His people classified as wicked? It is man replacing the rule and role of God over His people – for the Lord was already their King.

What are the differences of God’s direct rule over His people and man’s style? Consider the following:

**The book of Judges —when God was their King:**

1. There was no human organization or one man between Israel and God. (1:1-2)

2. God directed their decisions when asked, directed their battles, increased their crops and supplied gifted judges (military saviours) of His choice and timing (1—2).

3. God fought their battles on His terms with His wisdom (7:1-6).

4. God used unconventional meth-

2. Man (while having God’s power) directed the military decisions (11).

3. Man fought the battle on his terms with his wisdom (11).

4. A king is a system of taking from the people to sustain itself with conventional means and reducing them to his servants (thus robbing them of their liberty to follow God directly) (8:17).

5. A king, by its very nature, indirectly causes people to look to him and human ability rather than confidence alone in the Lord. (And when the king is down, so are the majority of the people). (13:5-7; 17:11, 24; 31:1-7).

Yet God would not forsake His people for changing His government. (12:22—23). God does not

**Prominent or Preeminent**

The chief difference between God’s New Testament church and the systems of men found in today’s church is the preeminence of Christ. Prominent means to be outstanding. Preeminence means to be above all. It might not be the gospel per se, but it is the exalted preeminence of authority, glory and trust in His wisdom that the Lord Jesus Christ is given in relation to the simple place that man is given that form the differences. See Psalms 9:20 and 83:18, for it is still the need today to know that men are just men and the Lord Jesus is the most High over His church.

Are there any today who long for the simplicity that is in Christ? Would you in your life or church like to hold to the Head and let Christ build His church His way and let man be the servant and not the leader? What would it be like to be totally governed and sustained by heaven while living on earth, Satan’s domain? “Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20).

**Randall Amos**  
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**T**rial, we must distinctly understand, is part of the diet which all true Christians must expect. It is one of the means by which their grace is proved, and by which they find out what there is in themselves. Winter as well as summer, cold as well as heat, clouds as well as sunshine, are all necessary to bring the fruit of the Spirit to ripeness and maturity. We do not naturally like this. We would rather cross the lake with calm weather and favourable winds, with Christ always by our side, and the sun shining down on our faces. But it may not be. It is not in this way that God's children are made "*partakers of His holiness.*" (Heb. 12:10). Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and Job were all men of many trials. Let us be content to walk in their footsteps, and to drink of their cup. In our darkest hours we may seem to be left, but we are never really alone. — J. C. Ryle



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# Hezekiah Part 6

**2 Chronicles 32:24 -26, 31;  
2 Kings 20:8-11;  
Isaiah 38 & 39.**

Second Chronicles 32 marks a distinct transition in the experience of Hezekiah. After the days of prosperity and revival recorded in chapters 29-31, this chapter records the difficulties that subsequently befell him. In verses 1-23 we have an account of the invasion by Sennacherib, events that took place in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, but that was not the only problem he faced. The remainder of the chapter mentions his sickness (v.24), and the visit of ambassadors from Babylon (v. 31). In respect of all these 2 Chronicles gives but a brief account.

## His sickness

A fuller account of the king's illness is given in 2 Kings 20:1-11 and Isaiah 38. We need first to observe when this sickness came. Hezekiah reigned for 29 years (2 Chron. 29:1), and in 2 Kings 18:13 we find that the king of Assyria invaded Judah in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign.

Following his sickness the Lord added 15 years to Hezekiah's life, (Isa. 38:5), indicating that his sickness was also in the fourteenth year; in fact from Isaiah 38:6 it is clear that at the time of Hezekiah's sickness deliverance from the king of Assyria still lay in the future. This is a reminder to us that often problems do not come alone, that a combination of difficulties can arise simultaneously.

Second Chronicles 32:24 says "In those days Hezekiah was sick to the

death"; while Isaiah 38:1 adds, "And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him thus saith the Lord set thine house in order for thou shalt die and not live". The early years of Hezekiah had been outstanding, so why was he now smitten in this way? We might suggest at least two possible reasons. First that it was in order to humble him. Had the years of prosperity produced a spirit of pride in Hezekiah's heart? Certainly that seemed to characterize his latter days (see vv. 25—26).

Second, was this a discipline from God following Hezekiah's attempt to appease the king of Assyria with a gift? Perhaps the Lord thereby

thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore." In turning "his face to the wall," Hezekiah sought to shut out all distractions that he might give himself wholly to prayer. It might appear, from the language he employs, that far from humbling himself he is actually boasting of all the good things he had done in light of which God ought to help him. That however is not the case at all. Hezekiah is appealing to God, "I beseech thee." His words were accompanied with weeping, and in verse 17 of that chapter he refers to his "sins". His prayer seems to reflect the command

**While it is our privilege to bring matters before the Lord in prayer, nevertheless the Lord is Sovereign, and our desire must ultimately be "Thy will be done"**

instructs him that the way to overcome difficulties was by looking to the Lord alone? Understood, either way, this sickness was a chastening from the Lord for Hezekiah's instruction (see Heb. 12:5-11).

## His supplication

Verse 24 says "Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the LORD." Isaiah 38:2 and 3 add further details, "Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before

of Solomon to the people at the dedication of the temple, "Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments", (1 Kings 8:61). Hezekiah is here asserting that he had sought to so walk before God. How much do these things figure in our thinking, walking before the Lord, in truth, with a perfect heart, doing what is right in His sight? Could we say that has been our aim, as Hezekiah did?

## His salvation

Isaiah 38:4 and 5 say, *“Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying, Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.”* The answer to his prayer to the Lord was immediate.

It is not always so. In John chapter 11 we have the occasion when Lazarus was sick, his sisters sent saying, *“Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick”*. But verse 6 says, *“When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.”* The message reached him, He heard Lazarus was sick, yet He remained where He was. The situation deteriorated and Lazarus died. The comparison between the two incidents should remind us that while it is our privilege to bring matters before the Lord in prayer, nevertheless the Lord is Sovereign, and our desire must ultimately be *“Thy will be done.”* But though the response was very different, in both cases the Lord heard the request.

Here the Lord says *“I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears”*, a reminder of the words of 1 Peter 3:12 *“the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.”* We might pray and the request might not be forthcoming, but we can rest assured the Lord has heard, the Lord has seen. In response to Hezekiah’s prayer 15 years were added to his life (Isa. 38:5).

## His sign

2 Chronicles 32:24 says, Hezekiah *“prayed unto the LORD: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign.”* The fullest account of this is in 2 Kings 20:8-11. In verse 8 Hezekiah requested a sign as confirmation that the Lord would fulfil His word, and

in verse 9, Isaiah gave him a choice *“This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?”* In reply Hezekiah said *“It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees”* (v.10), and that sign was given in answer to Isaiah’s prayer (v. 11).

Hezekiah considered it *“a light thing”* for the shadow to go down ten degrees, but a hard thing, contrary to nature, for it to go back ten degrees. Hezekiah would learn that nothing is too hard for God (see Jer. 32:17), but what was the significance

## Hezekiah’s God is our God—nothing is too hard for Him

of the sign? It was a reversal of the natural process, a message to Hezekiah that although he had a fatal sickness, though defeat at the hand of the Assyrians seemed inevitable, God could reverse natural processes. Hezekiah’s God is our God—nothing is too hard for Him. Deliverance being granted, Hezekiah reflected upon his experience and committed it to a psalm (Isa. 38:9-20), in which he resolves to do two things in response to God’s goodness to him. In verse 15 he commits to walk humbly before God *“to go softly all my years, in the bitterness of my soul,”* and in verse 20 to praise the Lord, *“we will sing my songs all the days of our life in the house of the Lord.”* But it is one thing to say those things, and another to actually do it.

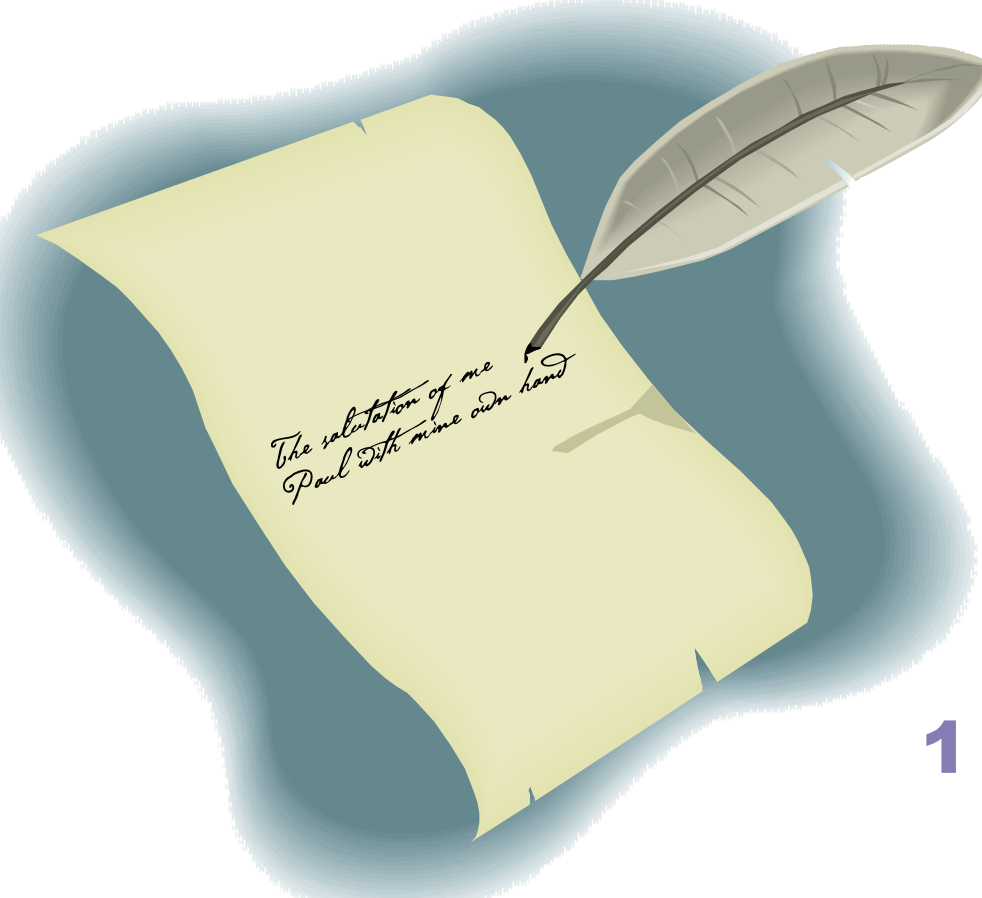
## His scrutiny

Hezekiah had promised to go softly, and in 2 Chronicles 32:31 when ambassadors came from Babylon, *“God left Hezekiah to try him, to know what was in his heart.”* From Isaiah 39:1 we learn that the king of Babylon, sent a present to Hezekiah, hearing that Hezekiah had recovered from sickness, and hearing of the sun going back, *“the wonder”* of 2 Chronicles 32:31. It would seem that he had an ulterior motive in doing that—a desire to survey the strength of Hezekiah and assess if there was any point in uniting with him against the Assyrians. But what was Hezekiah’s response? Isaiah 39:2 and 3 suggest rather than walking humbly before God or giving glory to Him, Hezekiah was flattered by the arrival of this deputation and when Isaiah asked *“what said these men, and from whence came they?”* Hezekiah made no mention of what they said, only that they had come from a far country. Wasn’t their pride that his fame had spread so far? Certainly 2 Chronicles 32:25 has this sad comment on his latter days, *“Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up.”* On this sad note Hezekiah’s history closes.

If God were to leave us, to try our heart what would it reveal? Conduct marked by humility before God or pride before men?

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The salutation of me  
Paul with mine own hand

# Faithful Friends & Final Words

## 1 Corinthians 16:15-24

*"I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth. I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such. The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss. The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen" (1 Cor. 16:15-24).*

**P**aul was a great companion. We seldom read of him alone, but often with co-workers, co-sufferers and fellow travelers. When separated from them he prays for them, commends them, and sends them salutations. Though the unquestioned writer of the Epistles, he frequently couples one or more names with his own in the introductions (e.g., 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Phil., Col., 1 Thess., etc.). He had a large heart, and believed in fellowship in the Gospel. In our Chapter (1 Cor. 16) he names seven such. He has something good to say of each, from which we may learn, for the Holy Spirit inspired these kindly words, as He did the deeper truths" (George Goodman).

### Faithful Friends (1:15-19)

Paul has already mentioned Timothy and Apollos, and now goes on to mention five others who were beloved companions and co-workers with him.

### Stephanas (16:15-16)

Actually it is the "house of Stephanas" which is mentioned here, Stephanas having been one of the few believers at Corinth whom Paul baptized (1 Cor. 1:16). This dear Christian family were the firstfruits of Achaia, meaning that they were the earliest converts in that area (in Rom. 16:5, Epaenetus is spoken of as the firstfruits of Achaia, but the correct translation in the Romans text should be Asia, not Achaia). It's evident that from the time of their conversion the "house of Stephanas" had "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." "Addicted" means "appointed" or "devoted." These dear saints set themselves apart, as it were, to the ministry of God's people. The word for "ministry" has no official air about it. It simply means "service," being the Greek word from which we get our English word "deacon."

Some have insisted on the basis of 1 Corinthians 1:16 that there were infants in the household of Stephanas, yet it is clear from 16:15 that there were no infants, since it is plainly stated that those of the household “devoted themselves” to serving the saints, something that no infant would be capable of doing.

In verse 16 Paul exhorted the Christians to be in subjection to those who serve Christ in this way. In other words, those who, at the call of God, set themselves apart to serve the Lord and His people should in turn be shown the love and respect of all believers.

### **Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17-18)**

Along with Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus were probably the bearers of the Corinthian letter to Paul (7:1). The meaning of verses 17 and 18 is probably the idea that these brethren had brought joy and cheer to Paul’s heart which the Corinthian believers were unable to supply because of the distance separating them. What they, as a local church, could not do, these brethren sent from Corinth had accomplished. The refreshing would be mutual, in that, they would hear the report of their representatives upon their return and would read this letter.

Are we engaged in this blessed ministry of seeking in temporal and spiritual ways to refresh the Lord’s people?

“Think a little about spiritual refreshment” (v. 18), wrote W. Graham Scroggie. “All, some time or another, need it; and all, in some way or another, may afford it. Many are the ways in which it may be ministered: by prayers, letters, books, visits, flowers; and great are the results achieved. Let us all today endeavour to ‘refresh’ someone.”

### **Aquila and Priscilla (16:19)**

We read of this husband and wife team in Acts 18:2-26. Both at Rome (Rom. 16:3-5) and at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19), Aquila and Priscilla had kept their home open as a gathering place for believers. The expression “*the church that is in their house*” gives us a glimpse into the simplicity of local church life at that time.

Aquila and Priscilla had been expelled as Jews from Rome by Claudius Caesar, and had previously settled at Corinth, where they provided a home for Paul, who joined them in their trade of tentmaking. It was they who took the gifted Apollos under their wing and instructed him in the way of God more perfectly, thereby rendering a great service to the Body of Christ.

“Asia” (v. 19) refers to the province, not to the continent of Asia, Ephesus having been located in that province.

### **Final Words (16:20-24)**

Several things are noted of Paul in these closing verse of 1 Corinthians 16.

### **His Salutations (16:20-21)**

The Ephesian saints sent greetings to the Corinthian saints, Paul enjoining the latter to greet each other with a “*holy kiss*” (see Rom. 16:16; 1 Thess. 5:26; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Pet. 5:14). This was an ancient custom, and at this point, an implied exhortation to put away their divisions. A “*holy kiss*” involved a greeting that was genuine, but because of abuses the handshake has largely taken its place. J.B. Phillips translated these words: “I should like you to shake hands all around as a sign of Christian love.”

### **His Warning (16:22)**

It was Paul’s custom to dictate

his letter to a co-worker, and at this point he took the pen from his amanuensis and added a few words in his own handwriting, giving his characteristic greeting. Immediately following his word of personal greeting is a word of warning. “Anathema” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “*harem*”, meaning “a thing devoted to destruction, the object of a curse” (see Rom. 9:3; Gal. 1:8-9; 1 Cor. 12:3). Actually, the word here should be followed by a period. It is a gravely serious thing not to love the Lord Jesus. “*Maranatha*,” which is the Greek transliteration of an Aramaic word can be translated in three ways: “Our Lord, come,” “Our Lord is come,” or “Our Lord cometh.” The warning note in the context would seem to favour the latter translation.

### **His Benediction (16:23)**

Paul was the apostle of grace, this benediction not only being characteristic of him but one of the key points in favour of the genuine Pauline authorship of the letter.

### **His Affection (16:24)**

Added to the apostle’s benediction is this final accent of love that has been displayed throughout the letter. His rebukes have been the rebukes of love, and his love has embraced all, even the disobedient and rebellious. We wonder if the Corinthians believers felt a sense of shame when the letter was read to them, or they read it for themselves.

If your name or mine had been included among those mentioned in this chapter, what comment might have accompanied it?

Let’s resolve today to be true help in the name of Christ (16:16).

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# PSALM SIXTEEN IN LIGHT OF GETHSEMANE



*"Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight. Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips. The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons. I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Ps. 16)*

**P**salm 16 is described in its title as a Michtam of David, written indeed by David but not meant to speak of David himself. Peter on the day of Pentecost stated that David in the psalm speaks concerning Christ (Acts 2:25) and specifically about the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:31). This Psalm has all the specifications of a Messianic Psalm; first because it is Christ-centered, and secondly because it has been quoted in the New Testament in reference to our Lord (See also Acts 13:34-37).

The use of the title Michtam is significant. It is a word that means golden, precious or a hidden precious secret. And no wonder it is used here. For the Psalm presents to us the dependant earthly life of the Savior, His total satisfaction with His God and His final victory shown in a life found through death. How could anything be more precious to our hearts?

As the dependant One, our Saviour, during His earthly life, was a Man of prayer. He often spent the whole night in prayer, such as when He was about to choose the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12). He prayed after

feeding the multitudes (Matt. 14:23). He rose up very early in the morning to pray after having a very busy time the day before (Mark 1:21-35). Often He withdrew Himself into the wilderness to pray (Luke 5:16). He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21), at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:41-42) and on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:29), just to mention a few examples.

With the exception of His high priestly prayer in John 17 and His prayers in Gethsemane, the contents of the Saviour's prayers were not always recorded word for word. Yet here in the book of Psalms the Holy Spirit was pleased to give us a prophetic fore-view of our Saviour's prayer life. And Psalm 16 is a very good example.

This article is meant as an attempt to have a fresh look at Psalm 16 in light of our Saviour's experience and prayers in Gethsemane. We will not be commenting on every verse in the Psalm.

The prayer starts in verse one with the Lord expressing His trust in God, His Preserver. This shows His faith in God in whom, while

here on earth, He found all His resources. He lived here in total dependence on the Father with whom He was continually in communion. He also was living in dependence on the Holy Spirit, thus He was said to be filled with the Spirit, led by the Spirit (Luke 4:1), and performing all His miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28). Thus we see the Author and Finisher of the faith implicitly trusting His God to preserve and deliver Him and He did, *“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, unto him who was able to deliver him [“out of” –margin] death and was heard in that he feared”* (Heb. 5:7). This verse in Hebrews is probably the closest reference to His prayers in Gethsemane.

Next we see the perfect Servant of Jehovah expressing His total satisfaction with His Master saying *“O my soul thou hast said to the LORD thou art my Lord, mine own goodness and none else beside thee”* (margin) (v. 2).

The Eternal Son, who for all eternity past has been the Father’s delight, now in the days of His flesh, is delighting in blessing and praising God for His care for Him and His goodness towards Him.

## **He came down from heaven to do the will of Him that sent Him even at the cost of laying down His life.**

He came down from heaven to do the will of Him that sent Him even at the cost of laying down His life. Christ clearly manifested His dependence on the Father while here on earth. For as He grew up before Him (Isa. 53:2), He always lived in

the light of his presence and could say *“But thou art he who took me out of the womb; thou didst make me hope upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother’s belly”* (Ps. 22:9-10).

## **Before us is One whose satisfaction came not from an earthly heritage, but as the True Levite (Deut. 18:2), He found it in the LORD who was His portion and inheritance.**

Has there ever been dependence on the Most High in the entire human race as this?

Verses five and six give us a blessed and glorious description of the absolute satisfaction of our Lord with Jehovah as He says: *“Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup; thou maintainest my lot.”* The *“portion of inheritance”* would refer us back to the days of Joshua when he divided the land to the nation, giving a portion of inheritance to each tribe, except for the tribe of Levi. Each one of those tribes may

have been more or less satisfied with their portion of inheritance; depending on its size, its location and the nature of the land. But here before us is One whose satisfaction came not from an earthly heritage, but as the True Levite (Deut. 18:2),

He found it in the LORD who was His portion and inheritance. Thus His portion is said to be a goodly heritage; found in pleasant places of fellowship and communion with the Father.

The word *“cup”* however expresses the enjoyment of that heritage. David says *“my cup runneth over”* (Ps. 23:5). Our Saviour’s cup and His portion were one and the same in Jehovah Himself (v. 5); hence His total satisfaction with Him.

The *“lot”* on the other hand, described here as maintained by the Lord, was what He had to face here on earth. Human beings often complain about what they call their *“lot in life.”* Our Saviour’s lot here was not an easy one. He never maintained a life of ease or luxury; for He was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And after a life of labour in which he *“endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself”* (Heb. 12:3), He went on to endure the cross of shame in dying for sinners. *“Yet no ungentle murmuring word escaped His silent tongue.”* His loyalty to the Father is so gloriously expressed in His words at the gate of Gethsemane, *“The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?”* (John 18:11).

Verses 7 and 8 open to our adoring eyes and minds the blessed resourc-

es from which the Savior drew His satisfaction here on earth. He was in continual communion with His Father, receiving counsel from Him for which He was thankful saying "I will bless the LORD who hath given

*"My heart also instructs me in the night seasons" (v. 7).*

In this state of perfect communion, perfect dependence and perfect obedience, He could truthfully say "I have set the Lord always before me" (v.

**Never did He speak or act in independence of the Father. But was content to speak the Father's words, and to do His works.**

*me counsel" (v. 7).* Hear His words in Isaiah: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word to him who is weary, he awakeneth morning by morning, he waketh mine ear to hear like the learned" (Isa. 50:4). Unbelief may ask, why was it necessary for the omniscient One to learn morning by morning? But we know that the One who took on Himself the form of a servant, was also willing to take the place of the learner. He would say to the Jews, "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me" (John 7:16). And again "As my Father hath taught me, I speak those things" (John 6:28). And yet again, "Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:50). Never did He speak or act in independence of the Father. But was content to speak the Father's words (John 17:8, 14), and to do His works (John 5:36; 17:4). His heart was occupied with prayer in the night seasons. He would meditate on the instructions and the counsel given to Him by the Father,

8). Is it at all possible for any member of Adam's race to continually abide in the presence of a Most Holy God? Or claim to have set Him continually before him? No, beloved this is a glory exclusive to the "Holy One of God"

(Mark 1:24). And no one else can share this with Him. He walked in perfect harmony with the Father so as to be able to say, "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29).

Most glorious claim indeed!

Therefore He is able to go on saying in full assurance, "Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (v. 8). He was never moved by the difficult circumstances of His life. He manifested steadfastness of purpose and a unique calm assurance that characterized His walk here on earth. Nor was His confidence shaken by the anticipated horrors of the cross and the grave. For it is said of Him "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).

But then some may ask what about that time of agony in Gethsemane? Why did the Saviour utter those three prayers there? Was He not cognizant of the will of the Father that He should go to Calvary?

**He was never moved by the difficult circumstances of His life. He manifested steadfastness of purpose and a unique calm assurance that characterized His walk here on earth. Nor was His confidence shaken by the anticipated horrors of the cross and the grave.**

Most assuredly He was, for he knew the Father with a perfect knowledge as He says in His prayer in John 17:25, "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee"; referring here to the eternal re-

relationship that existed between Him and the Father. Furthermore, here on earth all through His holy sinless sojourn, He was able to prove "that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

He certainly knew that the will of God was good, for it reflects His good nature and no one else is good but God (Matt. 19:17). Furthermore,

## **Now glorified to God's right hand, he is in the fullness, enjoying that love and glory which He had with the Father before the world began.**

was not the blessed Son involved in the eternal counsels of old? Was He not the very same One who said "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8-9). So when in the frailty of His humanity which once thirsted and hungered, and now in view of the cross He prays "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" We immediately hear Him say in absolute submission, "Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). Thus in so saying He was acknowledging indeed the good will of God.

We then hear Him praying again, this time the words are slightly but significantly changed: "O my Father, if this cup may NOT pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matt. 26:42). That is to say I am ac-

cepting this acceptable will of God. for it is the only way to satisfy His righteous judgment; the only way to bring many sons unto glory and the only way to open heaven to believing human beings.

The words of the third prayer are not recorded but the blessed results of them are. "Then He cometh to his disciples and saith unto them: sleep on

now and take your rest" (Matt. 26:45). Earlier in the evening He was asking them to watch and pray, why then should they be able to sleep and have their rest now? Has the cup been taken away? Not at all. Have the horrors of the cross been somewhat ameliorated? Not in the least. Yet now He is resting in that perfect will of God, saying to the disciples "Behold the hour is at hand and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of the sinners. Rise, and let us be going; behold he is at hand that doth betray me" (Matt. 26:45-46).

There is no hesitation now. His face is fixed like flint on the way to Calvary. "Jesus knowing all things that should come upon him went forth" (John 18:4).

Our Psalm expresses prophetically His feelings (perhaps at the end of the third prayer) by saying, "There-

fore my heart is glad and my glory [or my soul] rejoices, [and here is the assurance] my flesh also shall rest in hope" (v. 9). Yes, beloved, He went to Calvary resting in that perfect will of God. He entered the gates of death assured that God would not leave His soul in Hades nor did He have to suffer His precious body to see corruption (v. 10).

God delivered Him "out of death" when He raised Him from among the dead by His power and glory. And because God has shown Him the path of life through death, He now lives in the power of an endless life (v. 11).

Now glorified to God's right hand, he is in the fullness, enjoying that love and glory which He had with the Father before the world began, (John 17:5, 24); there where pleasures flow uninterruptedly forevermore (v. 11).

What manifold glories are revealed to us here as we meditate on the dependant obedient One who was assured of God's deliverance through death into life everlasting.

Exalted to the Father's throne,  
With glory and with  
honor crowned  
All at thy glorious Name  
shall bow  
As Lord of all by each  
be owned

—Inglis Fleming

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## Buried Thy Sins

In the deep silent depths far away from the shore,  
Where they never shall rise to trouble thee more,  
Where no far-reaching tide with its powerful sweep  
May stir the dark waves of forgetfulness deep,

I have buried them there-  
Where no mortal can see!  
I have cast all thy sins  
In the depths of the sea!

In the depths, in the depths, where the storm cannot come,  
Where its faint echo falls like a musical drum,  
Where no mortal can enter, thy faults to deride-  
For above them forever flows love's mighty tide!

In the sepulchral vaults  
Of which God holds the key!  
He has buried thy sins  
In the depths of the sea!

—Anonymous