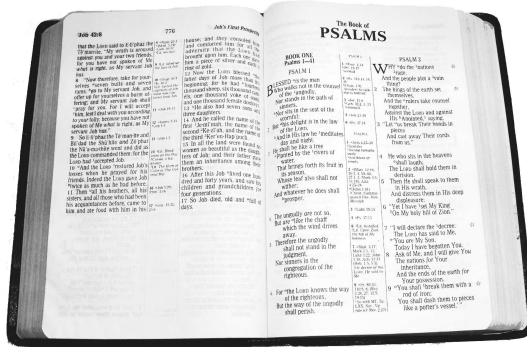


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



February 2017

Bible readings from 2 Samuel chapters 16 to 24
Galatians chapters 1 to 2

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The LORD had purposed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel

When Absalom arrived in Jerusalem, he was suspicious of Hushai's professed allegiance (16:15–17). Hushai's words, '*Long live the king!*' may have a double meaning (16). Absalom thought that Hushai was speaking of him, but Hushai was probably thinking of David. Israel may have chosen Absalom to be king, but God had chosen David (18).

Ahithophel advised Absalom to openly take possession of his father's harem; this would be seen as a sign of his own sovereignty. Ahithophel knew that such an act would make reconciliation impossible between Absalom and his father (20–23). His counsel had always been wise and convincing, and with both David and Absalom, it was *as if one had inquired at the oracle of God* (16:23). His advice was not normally questioned. Absalom and the elders of Israel readily agreed that Ahithophel should lead an army of twelve thousand men to pursue David. They would destroy him while he was still weak (17:1–4).

Absalom asked Hushai for his counsel, after revealing to him Ahithophel's plan. Hushai suggested that the counsel of Ahithophel was not good at this time (17:7). David and his mighty men would fiercely respond to an attack like a bear robbed of her cubs and Absalom's troops would probably be defeated. He appealed to the vanity of Absalom who should raise a great army from all Israel and lead them triumphantly into battle, overwhelming David and his troops. Hushai knew that this would give David time to recover from the disarray in which he found himself and that he would be able to plan his strategy while Absalom was assembling his army. Hushai's counsel was accepted, *for the LORD had purposed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel* (14).

Though David's circumstances were dark and bitter, the Lord was working on his behalf. **We should always remember that the Lord will never forsake those who love him and follow him! He is sovereign over all people, even our enemies.**

The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness

Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar the priests of the counsel given to Absalom by Ahithophel and by himself. Their sons who were to take this information to David, remained outside of Jerusalem for fear of being seen. They were seen by a lad however and he made known their whereabouts to Absalom. They escaped capture by hiding in a well and eventually reached David with Hushai's news and message urging him to cross the Jordan immediately (15–21).

David's prayer that the Lord would '*turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness*' (15:31) was answered. The traitor knew that the rejection of his advice would lead to defeat for Absalom and he took his own life (23). David may have had Ahithophel in mind when he wrote, '*Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me*' (Psalm 41:9). These words were quoted by Jesus concerning Judas Iscariot who also hanged himself (John 13:18; Matthew 27:3–5). Betrayal brings great distress but those who engage in such treachery will surely come to grief. The Lord Jesus knows just how we feel when we have been hurt or betrayed by those we trusted and he will vindicate us.

David came to Mahanaim (where the angels of God met Jacob; Genesis 32:1–2). The Lord did not encourage David by sending angels, but by sending three good men, Shobi, Machir and Barzillai, who brought provisions for David and his men (27). It is interesting to note that Mephibosheth had received kindness from Machir (9:4–5), and that Shobi was an Ammonite prince (cp. 10:1–2). These men were moved by the needs of David and his company, saying, '*The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness*' (27–29). **There are many needy Christians who need practical help; some may be in our own church?** If we are aware of their needs, we must show love and compassion towards them, and help them (1 John 3:16–18)?

To keep my name in remembrance

David divided his army into three companies and would have led them into battle but the people begged him to stay away. They valued him too highly to have him risk his life in battle (1–4). David was now quietly confident that God would give him victory and he commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai in the hearing of the people, ‘*Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom*’ (5–6). The two armies met in ‘*the woods of Ephraim*’ which were located in Gilead, not Ephraim; they were remembered by this name because the Ephraimites had once been defeated there by Jephthah (6; cp. 17:26; Judges 12:5). Absalom’s army suffered a great defeat and he was caught by his head in the boughs of a tree (probably because he was surprised and distracted when he met David’s servants).

Joab rebuked the man who told him that Absalom was hanging in a tree because he had not killed him. He told him that he would have richly rewarded him had he killed the rebellious prince. The man reminded him of the king’s instructions to deal gently with his rebellious son, stating that he would not kill him though offered a fortune. Joab chose to ignore the king’s command and he killed Absalom (9–15). Absalom died as an accursed man, hanging from a tree and buried under a large heap of stones (Deuteronomy 21:23; Joshua 7:15, 26; 8:29; 10:27).

Absalom had set up a monument to himself saying, ‘*I have no son to keep my name in remembrance*’ (18; this may have been before the birth of his sons; cp. 14:27). He wanted to be remembered, but what for? As a proud and arrogant man? As a treacherous man? As a murderer? His wicked rebellion against his father cost the lives of twenty thousand men (7–9). You may not have a monument by which you will be remembered, but how is your life? **Will you be remembered for folly or for godliness? You may be forgotten by men, but God will never forget your life and work (Matthew 25:31–40; Revelation 14:13).**

If only I had died in your place

Joab had wilfully disobeyed David by killing Absalom (5,12). He was not willing for Ahimaaz, a trusted friend of David, to take him the news so he sent a Cushite. After the man had left to go to the king, Joab reluctantly yielded to the request of Ahimaaz who outran the other messenger to reach David first (19–23). He told David that God had given them victory over the rebels. He could not bring himself to tell David of Absalom's death, however, and when the king asked him a direct question, he lied by saying that he was not aware of the fate of Absalom. The Cushite arrived to bring the news that he so much dreaded. David did not rejoice over the victory of his troops but went to his room to grieve and weep for his son (28–32).

David's moving lament for Absalom reveals the depth of his love for his wicked son: '*O my son Absalom — my son, my son Absalom — if only I had died in your place*' (33). What great yearning for such a treacherous son who had been responsible for bringing him so much distress. Sin brings terrible misery and heartache. When David had Uriah killed with the sword in battle, God had warned him, '*Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house*' (12:9–10). Ammon had already been murdered (13:28–29) and now Absalom had perished too.

Absalom, a wicked man, died in a tree (14). **The Lord Jesus, sinless and righteous, was nailed to a tree to save us from our sins so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God. He did not say, '*If only I had died in your place,*' he did die in our place!** He was mocked, tortured and crucified to save us from our sins. Oh, what amazing love! How do you respond to such love? Do you love him with all your heart? How does this show in your life? If you have not become a Christian, what is holding you back?

Arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants

David's grief and mourning for Absalom unsettled his people and cast a shadow over their victory (1–4). Joab sharply rebuked David, pointing out that he had turned victory into mourning with his excessive grief. This was a disgrace and a betrayal of the soldiers who had saved his life. He warned the king that his troops would desert him if he did not meet them and encourage them. He urged him, '*Arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants*' (7). **We must never be slow to show our gratitude to those who help us and encourage them. Let us remember that we sin if we are unthankful (2 Timothy 3:2). Never take others for granted!**

David took Joab's words to heart and he went out to meet his army (8). Joab was right in his assessment of the situation, but he was wrong to be so rough in his admonition of a heartbroken man. Let us remember that our rebukes must always be spoken with understanding, compassion and love (cp. Colossians 3:12–14).

David did not immediately return to Jerusalem, but waited to be recalled by popular acclaim. The people of Israel (the northern tribes) disputed among themselves about bringing back David to his palace to rule over them but those who wished to recognise him won the debate. The people of David's own tribe, Judah, showed no urgency to show their support for him. He sent word to his friends in Jerusalem, Zadok and Abiathar the priests, urging them to challenge the elders of Judah, saying, '*You are my brethren, you are my bone and my flesh. Why then are you the last to bring back the king?*' They were also to tell Absalom's army commander, Amasa, that David would appoint him to lead his army in the place of Joab (9–13).

David's words brought unanimous support from the men of Judah. They went to Gilgal, on the west bank of the Jordan, to meet their king and to escort him across the river (14–15).

How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king?

Shimei had every reason to be afraid with the restoration of the throne to David. He had cursed the king to his face and thrown stones at him when he fled from Jerusalem (16:5–13). Abishai would have killed him there and then but for the intervention of David. He now hurried to meet David on his return and cast himself upon him for mercy and confessed his guilt. He made no excuses for his wicked behaviour and said, *‘For I, your servant, know that I have sinned’* (19–20). David freely pardoned him, confirming this with an oath, though Abishai again wanted to kill him (21–23). He knew that this would indicate to Absalom’s supporters that the king would not take revenge against them. He remained suspicious of Shimei until the day of his death however and warned Solomon not to consider him guiltless (1 Kings 2:8–9).

David acted very graciously to Shimei but he was less than fair to Mephibosheth. The lame son of Jonathan had mourned the king’s overthrow but had been wickedly slandered by his servant Ziba. David had reacted by giving Mephibosheth’s land to the slanderer. He showed scant interest in punishing Ziba (who did not confess his guilt) and offered to restore only half of the land to Mephibosheth. Jonathan’s son was so pleased at David’s return that he said that he was prepared for Ziba to take all of his lands (24–30).

Barzillai was a great character! Though he was very old, he had supported David and had generously given him provisions when he fled from Jerusalem (31–32; cp. 17:27–29). Old age is no barrier to usefulness in God’s work! We can give ourselves to the vital ministry of prayer and if blessed with material things, give generous support to the work of God. David now wanted to honour Barzillai but the old man was not looking for any reward. He said, *‘How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?’* — **He was contented with life, even in old age with all its limitations (33–38). Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6) How is it with you?**

Why then do you despise us?

David had been hurt by his own tribe's slowness to call for his return to Jerusalem. They responded immediately to his complaint and went to bring their king back to his palace (15). David was so taken up with his own tribe of Judah that he did not appear to notice the fact that he had only half of the people of Israel with him.* The men of Israel strongly resented the prominence given to the tribe of Judah and they complained to David that their brethren from Judah had stolen him away. The men of Judah responded by saying that they had accompanied the king because he was closely related to them. They could not understand the anger of the others especially as they had never sought any special favours from the king.

Those of the ten tribes of Israel retorted that they had ten shares in David and had more right to him than the people of Judah. Moreover, they had been the first to support the return of the king to Jerusalem and they felt slighted by the men of Judah. They asked, '*Why then do you despise us?*' but the men of Judah were in no mood to be peaceful and were even more fierce in their arguments (40–43). The seeds of distrust and rivalry that were to divide the nation after the death of Solomon were already present (cp. 1 Kings 12). **If we are proud and despise others, we will cause trouble and division.**

Gordon Keddie observes, 'The application to modern life — not least to that of Christians in churches — is plain and ever urgent. The pride of Israel and Judah is still with us. More fellowship between Christians is broken by pride-related personal animosity than by genuine doctrinal disagreements ... When we do not saturate our relationships with the love of Christ, our differences can soon break out into sores that run with bitterness and rancour.' ('TRIUMPH OF THE KING' – Welwyn Commentary Series, published by Evangelical Press).

* The '*people*' and '*men*' in these verses do not refer to every individual in the tribes. David would have been escorted by the leaders of the tribes and their troops.

But he delayed longer than the set time

David had left his concubines in Jerusalem to care for his palace but Absalom had violated them (15:16; 16:21–22). When he returned home, he put them into seclusion (3). Dale Ralph Davis, quoting 12:11, points out, ‘The misery of these women was occasioned by David’s sin in the Bathsheba, Uriah affair. No, they were not homeless; David situated them in secluded quarters. Nor were they starving or destitute, for David provided for them. But he would have nothing more to do with them. They were confined, isolated, and alone ... There is simply something intensely, irretrievably sad about verse 3. ... We continue to meet this radical sadness in the kingdom of God. Scores of Christ’s people know what it is to have their lives turned to grey because of the sins of others. And when all is said and done, there is no help for it, except in the One sent “to bind up the broken-hearted” (Isaiah 61:1) and in the hand that promises to wipe away the tears from all faces (Isaiah 25:8).’ – COMMENTARY ON 2 SAMUEL, pages 205–206).

Sheba, who was from Saul’s tribe of Benjamin, was a worthless individual who took advantage of the bitter feelings between Judah and the other tribes of Israel. He led the men of Israel in a revolt against David persuading them that they had no part in David (2). The king had appointed Absalom’s army commander, Amasa, to lead his troops in the place of Joab (cp. 17:25;19:13) but Amasa proved to be unworthy of such a high command. David had ordered him to gather the men of Judah for battle within three days *but he delayed longer than the set time which David had appointed him* (4–5).

David was obliged to hand over command to Joab’s brother, Abishai, to lead the army against Sheba (6). Amasa lacked any sense of urgency in a time of great crisis. There is a message here for us in our confusing times. **We cannot afford to be complacent!** The Lord Jesus said, ‘*Do you not say, “There are still four months and then comes the harvest”? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!*’ (John 4:35). **There is much work to be done for the Lord. What are you doing?**

A wise woman

David had appointed Abishai, the brother of Joab, to put down the rebellion of Sheba, but it is obvious that Joab was in control of the army. We read of ‘*Joab’s men*’ in verse 7 and later, ‘*Joab was over all the host of Israel*’ (23). He was a brilliant general, but he was also a ruthless and dangerous man. Amasa caught up with David’s troops at the large rock in Gibeon. After meeting Amasa, Joab murdered him, while feigning to greet him (8–10). It was common practice to grasp a person’s beard while greeting them with a kiss. The right hand was the hand in which the sword was held and Amasa would not have expected that Joab would have a sword in his left hand (9).

Dale Ralph Davis observes, ‘Joab is both intensely loyal and completely uncontrollable. He does not raise the standard of revolt against David like Sheba, nor does he seek David’s throne like Absalom. Joab is faithful to David. he does not try to become king and yet he acts as his own king. He is extremely loyal to David but essentially unsubmitive to David ... There is such a thing as acknowledging the king’s sovereignty and disregarding his will (COMMENTARY, pages 208–209). Some in our churches are like Joab. They will not obey the will of King Jesus: ***‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven’*** (Matthew 7:21).

After killing Amasa, Joab pursued Sheba and trapped him in the town of Abel which was renowned for its wisdom. He mounted a siege to take the city and deal with Sheba. He would have destroyed it but for the intervention of ‘*a wise woman.*’ She called out to Joab and asked him, ‘*You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?’* (19). Joab told her that this was not his intention. He would depart from the city, if the rebel Sheba, was handed over to him. She persuaded the people to execute Sheba. After they had thrown the head of the rebel over the wall to Joab, he withdrew his troops and the city was spared (13–22).

And after that God heeded the prayer for the land

A famine devastated Israel for three years. This was an indication of divine judgment on Israel (Leviticus 26:14–16, 20) *and David inquired of the LORD*. God told him that the famine was a judgment on the nation because Saul had massacred some of the Gibeonites. These people were not Hebrews but had tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them; this guaranteed their survival when the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites (Joshua 9:14–15). Saul had violated that solemn oath and though many years had passed, God sent judgment (1–2). Israel was held responsible because Saul was their king. Time does not remove guilt for sin and though God is long-suffering, he is also just.

David asked the Gibeonites how he should make atonement for Saul's massacre. They indicated that they did not desire silver or gold from the estate of Saul, nor for any man in Israel to die. He then promised that he would do anything that they asked, and they demanded that he hand over seven descendants of Saul to be hanged. Saul had murdered and that must have atonement. Justice must be seen to be done. David may not have expected such a demand after their first response to him, but Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan was spared (1–9). Dale R. Davis has some helpful comments on this incident (COMMENTARY ON 2 SAMUEL, page 223). See also Gordon Keddie (THE TRIUMPH OF THE KING, pages 195–196). Atonement is costly! The Lord Jesus made atonement for our sin through his death on the cross.

Rizpah's devotion to her sons seen in her grief for them is very moving. Their bodies had been left hanging and she set up a makeshift tent from which she guarded the bodies day and night from scavenging birds and beasts. David was moved by her example to have the bodies of Saul and Jonathan re-buried in their family grave together with those who had been hanged. David had put matters right with the Gibeonites on behalf of Israel. *And after that God heeded the prayer for the land* (14). Once matters were put right, the prayers for the famine to end were heard. **There is an important principle here — If we disobey God and cling to sin, he will not hear our prayers (Psalm 66:18).**

David grew faint

These verses record the killing of four giants in battles between Israel and the Philistines. One of them, Ishbi-Benob, came very close to killing David in one of these battles. *David grew faint ... but Abishai ... came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him.* David's men vowed never again to allow their king to lead them in battle as he was too precious to be lost (15–17). What can we learn from these verses?

- We will always have battles in the Christian life (cp. 2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:10–18; 1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3–4). David killed one giant, but he encountered others later in his life. We may enjoy great victories over temptation, hindrances and problems in the Christian life but **we must never become complacent!** There are other 'giants' who will attack us and we will at times grow faint in God's work. If you are familiar with John Bunyan's great Christian classic 'The Pilgrim's Progress' you may recall how a man called Vain-confidence assured them that the way through By-path Meadow led to the Celestial City. They soon fell into a deep pit and were captured by Giant Despair who imprisoned them in Doubting Castle. You will need to read 'The Pilgrim's Progress' if you do not know the outcome.
- We need each other just as David needed Abishai. Do not isolate yourself from your fellow-believers. They need your help and encouragement and you need them. If the great apostle Paul needed the fellowship of other Christians (eg. 2 Timothy 1:16; 4:9) so do you. Christian 'loners' make life very difficult for themselves.
- Matthew Henry comments, 'The most powerful enemies are often reserved for the last conflict. David began his glory with the conquest of one giant, and here concludes it with the conquest of four. Death is a Christian's last enemy ... but, through him that triumphed for us, we hope even over that enemy to be more than conquerors at last.'

He delivered me because he delighted in me

The song in this chapter is repeated with just a few differences in Psalm 18. Verse 1 appears as the title of Psalm 18 which then begins, ‘*I will love you, O LORD, my strength.*’ The psalm breathes out praise to God for his deliverance. This chapter is quoted with reference to the Lord Jesus Christ (verses 3 and 50 ; cp. Hebrews 2:13; Romans 15:9). We can trace the sorrows, suffering and triumph of Christ in this psalm, but it is also rich in its description of the experiences of the child of God.

Look at the description of God’s greatness and strength in verses 2 and 3: ‘*My rock ... my fortress ... my deliverer ... my strength ... my shield ... the horn of my salvation* (the ‘horn’ is a symbol of strength) ... *my stronghold.*’ We have a strong God who is deserving of our trust and worthy of our praise (4). The Lord does hear us and he does deliver us (7, 17–20). Are you going through a time of severe trial? Trust in God and take heart; he will never fail you.

This psalm not only tells of God’s strength, but also of his grace. *He delivered me because he delighted in me*’ (20). Think of this staggering truth. If you are a Christian, God delights in you and those who would fight you fight the Almighty (cp. Acts 5:39; 9:1,4–5). Though God delights in his beloved Son, he delivered him up to terrible suffering and death to save us (5–7; cp. Romans 8:32). This should overwhelm us with wonder, love and praise to our glorious God. Are you feeling low or lonely? Remember that the Lord delights in you and that he will surely deliver you from all your enemies and your trials.

True religion means enjoying a relationship with the God who delights in his people. Notice the repetition of ‘*he ... me*’ in verses 17 to 20. **Do you know God by personal experience? Can you honestly testify to his gracious dealings with you? Do not be content with a half-hearted, dull ‘Christianity’.** Seek the Lord and call upon him in prayer. He will make himself known to you so that you too will praise him from a heart overflowing with love.

As for God, his way is perfect

Verses 21 to 25 point to the Lord Jesus. He alone merits reward for his righteousness. We are all sinners and *all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:10). Wonder of wonders! God makes sinners righteous by his grace and imputes (puts to our account) the righteousness of Christ to us. We are no longer condemned for our sins but accepted by God! If we love the Lord, we will do all that we are able, to keep ourselves from falling into sin (24). As we behave towards others, God will deal with us (26–27). How can we expect to find mercy from God, if we are not merciful? (cp. Matthew 6:12; 18:21–35).

There are times when we are baffled by the ways of God with us. Let us be encouraged by verse 31: *As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven*. God's way is perfect because he is infinitely wise, powerful and good. **God's Word is a proven word because he cannot lie and he will never fail us. All his promises are true!** David proved it, countless thousands since have proved it, and so can we. Hallelujah!

God also strengthens us and makes our way perfect (33). His *gentleness* has made us great (36 – the Hebrew for *gentleness* means 'humility'). God in grace stoops down to lift us up to make us great (and what can be greater than being a child of God?). He supports us (37). Let us worship him, for he is *worthy to be praised* (4).

*God shall alone the refuge be,
And comfort of my mind;
Too wise to be mistaken, he,
Too good to be unkind.*

*When I the tempter's rage endure,
'Tis God supports my mind;
Too wise to be mistaken, sure!
Too good to be unkind.*

(Samuel Medley)

The LORD lives!

David rejoiced in the victories that God had given him over his enemies (38–46). These verses also point to the victories of David’s greater Son, the Messiah, who will triumph over all his enemies and will come again as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11–16). David undoubtedly possessed great skills as a leader in battle, but he acknowledged that it was God who had armed him with strength to fight (40). His opponents were fighting God and when they finally prayed, it was too late (42). If you are not a Christian, I plead with you, ‘Do not refuse to listen to God’s voice’ (see Hebrews 3:7–12). It is a solemn thing to know that a time may come when God will refuse to hear our prayers if we refuse to listen to his voice (42).

We must not lead our lives as if God were dead. Never forget, ‘*The LORD lives!*’ (47). We are privileged to have fellowship with the living, personal God.

- He lives to avenge us when we are wronged but we must never take personal revenge on those who wrong us (48; cp. Romans 12:19–21).
- God lives to deliver us and to give us victory over Satan. If we resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7).
- The Lord lives to prosper his work, to build his church, and to keep us in all our ways.
- He is the eternal God who lives to help us through the dark valley experiences. Nothing, not even death, can separate us from his love (Romans 8:38–39).

The song closes with God’s *anointed* (or Messiah) rejoicing in his everlasting kingdom (50–51; cp. Romans 15:9). **Let us also give thanks to the Lord and sing praises to his name (50).**

*The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock!
Let God be exalted, the Rock of my salvation!’(47).*

An everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure

There is all the difference in the world between the child of God and the unbeliever as they face death. In his last words which are written as a song, David is able to review the past with gratitude and to look to the future with hope and confidence.

The sweet psalmist of Israel was inspired by the Holy Spirit to utter the psalms. He said, *'The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and his word was on my tongue'* (1–2). The Bible is not just an ordinary book; it is unique! *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God* (2 Timothy 3:16: the Greek word translated *'by inspiration'* means *'breathed out'*). The Bible is God-breathed! We read elsewhere, *For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit'* (2 Peter 1:21). Satan hates the Word of God and he has tempted men and women to doubt it from the earliest times (Genesis 3:1,4). We should not be surprised that the Bible is attacked and scorned. What a privilege it is to know that God speaks to us today through his precious Word! Do you pray and expect him to speak to **you** when **you** read your Bible?

The ideal ruler is described in verses 3 and 4. David had himself fallen short of that ideal but he could rejoice because God had made with him *an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure* (5). The dying king had a sense of great security in this covenant which had been ordered in all things by the almighty God who cannot fail. He knew that from his house would come the righteous King, the Messiah (cp. Jeremiah 33:15–17). The kingdom of the Lord Jesus is like *a morning without clouds* (4). David closes his song with a warning of the terrible end of the wicked (6–7). **Are you a real Christian? How foolish it is to live with unforgiven sin and with uncertainty when God is willing to save you.** He will make you his own child if you will come to the Lord Jesus, repenting of your sin and trusting in him.

*We expect a bright tomorrow,
All will be well.*

(Mary Peters)

The men who went in jeopardy of their lives

David was a great soldier, but he also owed much to his mighty men who are listed in the remaining verses of this chapter. Their exploits have a number of lessons and challenges for us. They displayed:

- Courage – Josheb-Basshebeth fought and gained victory in a seemingly impossible situation (8). In a Philistine attack, the people fled, but Shammah stood firm and courageously defended the field against the Philistines and defeated them. Shammah was a brave man, but he owed his success to God. *And the LORD brought about a great victory* (11–12).
- Perseverance – Shammah was strong in defence, but Eleazar was strong in attack. He persevered until his hand stuck to his sword and God gave him a great victory (9–10).
 - Sacrificial service – When David was at the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1), he expressed his longing for a drink of water from a certain well in Bethlehem. The Philistines were garrisoned in Bethlehem at that time, however. Three mighty men *went in jeopardy of their lives* for their king. They *broke through the camp of the Philistines* to draw water from the well and brought it to their king. David was greatly moved by their devotion and he would not drink the water but poured it out to the Lord (15–17). The Jehovah’s Witnesses use David’s words in verse 17 as a proof text against blood transfusion. It has nothing to do with blood transfusion.

The Lord Jesus gave his life to die in terrible agony to save us from our sins. He is worthy of our total devotion and loyalty. There is a greater need than ever for men and women of courage in the church. We must stand firm for truth and holiness in the face of confusion and compromise. The Christian message is despised and rejected by many and there are many pressures to compromise. Think about the virtues of David’s mighty men and prayerfully seek the grace of God to show them in your life.

... and Uriah the Hittite

Joab's two brothers, Abishai and Asahel are listed with the mighty men (18, 24). Abishai's exploit in killing three hundred with his spear is recorded, but there is no mention of the deeds of Asahel who was killed by Abner, early in David's reign (2:18–23).

Benaiah overcame immensely strong men. He killed a lion and fought a huge Egyptian, tearing his spear from his hand, and then killing him with it. (20–21). We may not attain to great physical strength, but we must aim to be strong in the Lord (Ephesians 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:1). *Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong* (1 Corinthians 16:13).

The list of mighty men continues with their names, but gives no detail of their exploits (24–39). The last mentioned on the list is *Uriah the Hittite* (39), whose faithfulness to his king was rewarded by betrayal from the man he served. David found mercy and forgiveness from God but he would never forget his foul deed when he schemed that Uriah should be killed in battle. God is gracious and this should always humble us (cp. Paul's testimony in 1 Corinthians 15:9–10).

The mighty men are not forgotten and the Lord will not forget us, nor will he ever leave us. It is always a great encouragement to read the roll of honour of God's heroes in Hebrews chapter 11. The New Testament also has a record of the faithful service of great characters such as Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3–4) and Onesiphorous (2 Timothy 1:16–18).

Our work for the Lord is important and he will reward us for faithful, self-denying service. 'A cup of cold water' given to refresh a thirsty soul is not forgotten (Matthew 10:42; 25:34–40).

*O use me, Lord, use even me,
Just as thou wilt, and when, and where,
Until thy blessed face I see,
Thy rest, thy joy, thy glory share.*

(Frances Ridley Havergal)

Why does my lord the king desire this thing?

We do not know why the Lord was angry with Israel, but he moved David to take a census. Satan is also said to have moved David to take the census (1 Chronicles 21:1). This is not a contradiction, for the Lord uses Satan and evil spirits to fulfil his purposes and Satan can only act with God's permission (cp. 1 Kings 22:19–23; Job 1:12; 2:6). The Lord sanctioned census-taking in Israel for those twenty years of age and above. Those numbered were required to give an offering of half a shekel to the Lord to avoid a plague (Exodus 30:11–16).

We are not told why it was wrong for David to take the census on this occasion. David knew the reason, however, because we later find him confessing his sin for numbering the people (10). He may have been motivated by a desire to boast of his military might (2). There is no evidence that a half-shekel was offered by each of those who were recorded in the census, and God plagued the people (15).

Joab, who was not a spiritual man, warned David against this futile exercise. He asked him, '*But why does my lord the king desire this thing?*' (3). David would not listen to him and the census took almost ten months to complete (2–9).

When someone is bent on a course of disobedience to God, they will shut their ears to sense and reason. Has Satan been whispering in your mind, tempting you to a wrong course of action? Are you refusing to listen to sound spiritual advice? Oh, do not be foolish like David was on this occasion. Come to the Lord and ask him to give you grace and strength to help you overcome the wiles of the devil.

*O give me, Lord, the tender heart
That trembles at the approach of sin;
A godly fear of sin impart,
Implant and root it deep within,
That I may dread thy gracious power
And never dare to offend thee more.* (Charles Wesley)

Nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing

David realised the folly of his actions and was convicted and in great distress (10, 14). The Lord sent Gad, the seer, with a message for David telling him that he would be punished for his sin. David realised the folly of his actions and was convicted and in great distress (10, 14). He must choose either seven years of famine, three months of military defeat by his enemies, or three days of plague in the land at the hand of the angel of the Lord. A very distressed David chose punishment at the hand of God, acknowledging that the mercies of the Lord are great (11–14).

David witnessed the terrifying sight of the angel of the Lord striking the people and he cried out again to God. The Lord, in his mercy, stopped the plague short of Jerusalem at the threshing-floor of Araunah (also known as Ornan; 16–18; cp. 1 Chronicles 21:15). The prophet Gad told David to erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing-floor. Araunah refused any payment for his threshing-floor and offered David wood and animals for the sacrifices (19–23). David insisted on paying him, saying, *'Nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing'* (24). The temple was later built on this very site, the place of sacrifice (2 Chronicles 3:1).

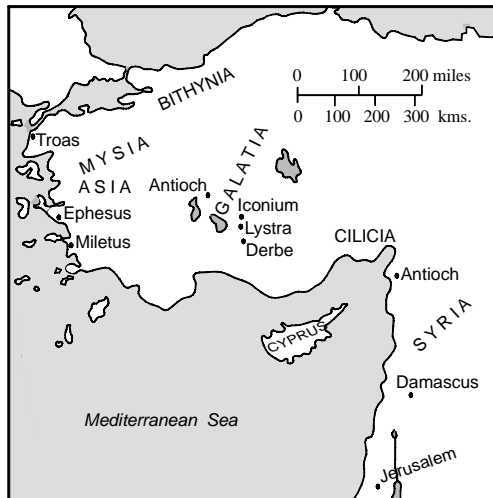
David paid 50 shekels of silver for the threshing floor and the oxen to sacrifice (24). In 1 Chronicles 21:25 it says that he paid 600 shekels of gold. There is no contradiction! David not only purchased the threshing floor but the whole site for building the temple. A threshing floor was insufficient for the temple and 1 Chronicles 22:3 shows that a huge area was needed for the materials for the temple building.

There is a great challenge for us here. Our Saviour loves us and gave himself to save us from our sins Surely we should be delighted to give generously to his work and to labour sacrificially for him? **Are we offering to God something that costs us nothing? Are we giving him only our second-best? Half-hearted service is not acceptable!**

GALATIANS

On his first missionary journey the apostle Paul established churches in southern Galatia at Antioch (in Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13:13 to 14:23). He revisited these churches on his second missionary journey and may have established other churches further north (Acts 16:1–6). We cannot be certain just when Paul wrote his letter to the Galatian churches. Some (eg. Calvin) believe that he wrote it after he had returned to Antioch in Syria from his first missionary journey, approximately AD 49. Others (eg. William Hendriksen) think that Paul wrote the letter from Corinth during his second missionary journey, approximately AD 52.

The Galatian churches were being troubled by false teachers (Judaizers) who were insisting that Gentile converts be circumcised and observe Jewish feasts. These people were a menace and were causing much damage in the young churches. They also troubled the church at Antioch in Syria (Acts 15:1–5). Paul wrote to the Galatian churches out of very deep concern (1:6; 3:1; 4:15–20) to warn them against this pernicious teaching which brought bondage (4:9; 5:1–2). Any attempt to add to the work of Christ in salvation is *a different gospel*, a perverted gospel (1:6–7). A message of ‘Christ plus’ for salvation is a false gospel which denies the grace of God and the sufficiency of Christ’s death to save sinners. Christ plus good works, plus baptism, plus penance, plus purgatory, plus anything else is a vain and useless gospel. We must guard our liberty and never compromise *the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24).



Outline of Galatians

1. The Origin of the Gospel (chapters 1 and 2)
 - Opening Greetings – 1:1–5
 - Crisis in Galatia (a different gospel) – 1:6–10
 - The gospel given to Paul by revelation from God – 1:11–24
 - Paul’s apostleship recognised in Jerusalem – 2:1–10.
 - Why Paul rebuked Peter – 2:11–14
 - Justification only through faith in Jesus Christ – 2:15–21

2. The Gospel Defended (chapters 3 and 4)
 - An appeal from experience and from Scripture – 3:1–9
 - Curse and blessing – 3:10–14
 - The purpose of the law – 3:15–23
 - Sons of God not through law but through faith – 3:24 to 4:7
 - The folly of returning to bondage – 4:8–11
 - A passionate personal appeal – 4:12–20
 - Two sons, two covenants, two Jerusalems – 4:21–31

3. The Gospel Applied (chapters 5 and 6)
 - The gospel and liberty – 5:1–12
 - The gospel and love – 5:13–15
 - The works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit – 5:16–26
 - Burden bearing – 6:1–5
 - Sowing and reaping – 6:6–10
 - Boasting – false and true – 6:11–16
 - Conclusion and Benediction – 6:17–18

Note: Some of the readings in Galatians will be repeated for several days in order to set in context the particular verses covered by the notes. Do read the repeat passage of Scripture each day so that it will be impressed on your mind.

Grace to you and peace

False teachers had infiltrated the churches of Galatia; their influence had undermined Paul's authority as an apostle as well as his message. He begins his letter by stressing that he was appointed an apostle, not by men, but by the risen Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father (1). The apostles were unique, being directly appointed by God; they have no successors. We now have all the apostolic teaching that we need in the Scriptures; it is rather ironic that most of those who claim apostolic succession transmitted through the laying on of hands of their bishops deny the very gospel that Paul so vehemently defended in this letter.

Paul does not identify the brethren who were with him when he wrote *to the churches of Galatia* (2). The opening greetings in all of his letters include the words '*grace and peace*' (3; cp. Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; etc).

- '*Grace*' is a wonderful word which speaks of God's favour which we do not deserve and which is freely given to us. The Bible reminds us, *By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast* (Ephesians 2:8–9). We cannot save ourselves. The false teachers in Galatia were denying the grace of God by their insistence on circumcision and other law-works for salvation. The well-being of the Galatian Christians was at stake. Have nothing to do with anyone who denies grace by teaching that we are saved through good works.
- '*Peace*' is the profound well-being of the soul which results from the grace of God in our lives. The peace of God is a great blessing given by the Lord Jesus to every believer (John 14:27). Satan is always seeking to rob us of that precious peace.

Are you discouraged? Has the devil been whispering his lies into your mind? Think about the wonderful grace of God and of his peace *which surpasses all understanding*. This peace will guard your heart and mind through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins

The love of Christ is truly amazing! He willingly *gave himself for our sins* to endure the most appalling shame, suffering and death (4; cp. John 10:11,17–18). The Lord Jesus has saved us from the pollution, guilt and condemnation brought about by our sin. He gave himself to *deliver us from this present evil age* (4). This present evil age will pass away (1 John 2:17) but we belong to heaven (Philippians 3:20) and the future is ours in Christ. This age is dominated by evil but Christ has rescued us from its tyranny. Jesus said, *‘If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed’* (John 8:36). There is a great joy and exhilaration in knowing Christ and the liberty that he gives. Do you know this freedom from the dominion of sin (Romans 6:14) and from the power of *this present evil age*? If you do not know this wonderful freedom, seek the help of a Christian friend or pastor, who will point you to Christ who died and rose again to save us.

The devil is very cunning and he uses false teachers (as he did in Galatia) to rob us of our liberty. We may be free from the slavery of sin only to be burdened with man-made rules which have no biblical warrant. We must beware of legalistic attitudes which bring bondage and misery.

Our salvation and Christ’s death were *according to the will of our God* (4). The Lord Jesus came into the world to save sinners and to destroy the works of the devil (1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 3:8). He willingly submitted to the will of God the Father to die for us (Matthew 26:39; Philippians 2:8). **Dare we give him our second best? Let us be whole-hearted in our devotion to our precious Saviour.** The more that we think of all that God has done for us, the more we will be overwhelmed in wonder, love and praise. To God the Father *be glory for ever and ever* (5).

A different gospel

This is the only letter of Paul in which there are no words of thanks to God for his readers (cp. Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4, etc.). The apostle was so deeply distressed and dumbfounded at the news from Galatia that he wrote, '*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel*' (6). Satan never rests and one of his wiles is to seek to deceive new Christians and new churches with false teaching. He seeks to turn them from Christ who called them in grace, to something which is not the gospel (good news).

We are called *in the grace of Christ* (6) but *a different gospel* is a perversion of the gospel of Christ (7). There is only one gospel, there is only one way to forgiveness and peace with God, and that is through the sacrifice of Christ for sins (4). Paul did not tolerate false teachers and he called down the curse of God upon them (8–9). We live in perilous times when many who claim to be Christian leaders have watered down the gospel and the teaching of the Bible. False teachers may have pleasing personalities, some claim to perform miracles, but we must have nothing to do with them. Even if an angel from heaven came and preached a different gospel from that revealed in Scripture, we must shut our ears to him. **A different gospel leads in one direction only – to hell!**

The Judaizers may have represented Paul as a man-pleaser because he did not insist that Gentile Christians be circumcised, but the apostle emphatically denied this charge. He said that if he sought to please men, he would not be the servant of Christ (10). **We must never compromise the gospel to please men, or to accommodate ecumenical and inter-faith practices.** We may be slandered as isolationists or as bigots, but we must remain true to God. Let us remember, however, that we must always be gracious and courteous in our stand for truth. Our lives must commend our message!

But when it pleased God

Paul began his letter by emphasizing that God had appointed him as an apostle (1). He now goes on to show that the gospel that he preached also has its origin in God. His message was not man-made, but came *through the revelation of Jesus Christ* (11–12). Paul then expands on this theme by showing that:

- He had been a devout Jewish scholar who had zealously upheld the traditions of his ancestors. He had once hated the gospel and had persecuted the church in order to destroy it (13–14).
- He did not learn his message from others when he was saved, but went to Arabia to learn of God (15–17).
- He did not learn it on his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, when the only apostles that he saw were Peter and James (18–24).

When Paul wrote about his conversion, he was careful to give all the glory to God. What was it that changed a man who hated the church of God and the name of Jesus into one who so loved Christ and who worked tirelessly to make known the gospel? It was the free and sovereign grace of almighty God! *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me* (15–16). Paul described his message as *the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24). The good news that we are saved by grace and not by works (Ephesians 2:8–9) was being denied by the false teachers who had entered the Galatian churches.

But when it pleased God ... **Christian, you have been saved because it pleased God to save you! How should you respond to such grace? Surely, you will love him, joyfully obey him, and you will magnify his name!**

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found:
Was blind, but now I see.*

(John Newton)

He ... now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy

Paul did not return to Jerusalem after his conversion, but went to Arabia (east of Damascus). What he most needed at this time was not fellowship with men (to *confer with flesh and blood*, 16–17), but to have communion with God in the solitude of Arabia. Details of this time in Arabia are not recorded in the Book of Acts. Paul went to Jerusalem three years after his conversion to see Peter and remained there for fifteen days. He did not see any of the other apostles, though he did meet James, the brother of the Lord Jesus (18–19) who was a leader in the Jerusalem church (2:9; cp. Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). Paul did not go on to visit the churches of Judea, but they heard that *he who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy* (23).

Paul had been totally committed to the Jewish faith, *being more exceedingly zealous* for the traditions of his fathers than many of his contemporaries (14). He had been a fanatical follower of the system which the Judaizers were now attempting to impose on the Galatian Christians alongside the gospel. He had believed the Christian faith to be wrong and dangerous, especially the teaching that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, who died and rose again to save sinners. The bitter enemy of the gospel had become a preacher of that same gospel and the churches glorified God (24). No one is beyond the reach of the grace of God, no one is too hard for the Lord to save. The Lord Jesus was once asked, ‘*Who then can be saved?*’ and he replied, ‘*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God*’ (Luke 18:26–27).

Let us persevere in our prayers for loved ones and friends who do not know Christ as their Saviour. Let us also pray for those we know who are the enemies of the gospel, for God *delights in mercy* (Micah 7:18). Let us pray that the Lord will be pleased to save many through his grace and that his name will be glorified.

To whom we did not yield submission, even for an hour

Paul again visited Jerusalem after fourteen years (1). Some take this to mean fourteen years after his conversion and identify this visit with that recorded in Acts 11:30, but this is unlikely. Others take it to be fourteen years after the first-mentioned visit (1:18) and link it with the events recorded in Acts chapter 15 (approximately AD 50; William Hendriksen supports this point of view in his commentary on Galatians, published by Banner of Truth Trust).

Paul and Barnabas were accompanied on this visit to Jerusalem by Titus, who though a Gentile was not compelled to be circumcised (3). If this was the case at Jerusalem in the presence of apostles such as Peter (Cephas), why should Galatian Gentiles be compelled to submit to circumcision? This visit had been fraught with tension because of *false brethren* who had been brought in secretly and had come in by stealth to spy out the freedom that he enjoyed in Christ. This was freedom from an obligation to observe the works of the law in order to obtain salvation. These men were not genuine Christians but had a false gospel which brought Christians into the bondage of law-keeping (4). False teaching can easily ensnare the unwary or weak believer.

The false brethren seemed to carry an influence but that did not concern Paul who was not intimidated by such people (6). Paul wrote concerning them, *To whom we did not yield submission even for an hour* (5). There is all the difference in the world in yielding submission to others as we deny ourselves for Christ's sake (Philippians 2:3–4) and yielding submission to false teachers who are the enemies of truth and of the gospel. **It is not a mark of graciousness to allow false teachers to speak in our churches, it is a sign of weakness and a neglect of responsibility.**

They desired only that we should remember the poor

The Lord had worked effectively both in Peter whose apostleship was to the Jews, and in Paul whose apostleship was to the Gentiles (7–8). James, mentioned in these verses, must not be confused with the brother of John, who was martyred by Herod (Acts 12:2). James who was described as a ‘*pillar*’ in the Jerusalem church, was the Lord’s brother (1:19). With Peter and John, he was highly respected by that church (12). The Holy Spirit used him to write the letter which bears his name.

Paul pointed out that these church leaders in Jerusalem had given Barnabas and himself *the right hand of fellowship* (9). This was a token of their friendship and a recognition that Paul and Barnabas should take the gospel to the Gentiles. The Judaizers who had brought ‘*a different gospel*’ (1:6) to Galatia were therefore to be rejected. The apostles at Jerusalem would continue to make evangelism among the Jews their main focus.

The apostles did not make an issue of circumcision for Gentile Christians. Paul wrote that ‘*they desired only that we should remember the poor* (mainly Jewish Christians), *the very thing which I was eager to do*’ (10). Paul willingly honoured this request throughout his ministry (cp. Romans 15:25–26; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9). Though we must never compromise the gospel, we must never become so hard in our attitude that we have no compassion for sinners or for the poor.

Many thousands of Christians are suffering great poverty in some parts of the world, often because of persecution. We should remember them in our prayers and in giving regularly to help them in their need. There are a number of reputable Christian agencies through whom we can channel our gifts. **How often do you remember the poor?**

They were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel

The Old Testament laid down strict dietary laws for the Jews (eg. Leviticus 11) and over the centuries many man-made restrictions had also been imposed. The Pharisees used the law of purity (Leviticus 15) to insist on ritual washing before meals to purify the person from any contact made with Gentiles (cp. Matthew 15:1–2). These traditions brought a problem to the early church when Gentiles became Christians: ‘How can Jewish Christians eat with Gentile believers?’

Even great Christians disagree and here Paul refers to an incident arising from the problem of Jews and Gentiles eating together. He had sharply disagreed with Peter who had been quite happy to eat with Gentile Christians when he visited Antioch (in Syria, 12). When certain men from James, the leading elder at the Jerusalem church arrived (1:19; 2:9; cp. Acts 15:13), Peter separated himself from these Gentile Christians at meals because he feared the Judaizers. *Even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy* (13). Some people believe that Peter was the first head of the church but they have no proof of this whatever. Do you think that Paul would have written to say that Peter was to be blamed for inconsistency and hypocrisy had he been the head of the church? The only head of the Christian church is the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22–23; 5:23–24).

Paul saw that Peter and his party *were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel* and he challenged them about their hypocrisy (14). **Our lives must be consistent with our doctrine if we are to commend the gospel.** The pressures to compromise are different today from those encountered by the early church, but the principles taught by Paul are still the same. We must always be *straightforward about the truth of the gospel*. We must not water down the truth by saying one thing and doing another. *The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe* (Proverbs 29:25).

Justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law

Man's great dilemma is found in the question posed by Job. *'How can a man be righteous before God?'* (Job 9:2). Our sin brings us under the condemnation of God's holy law. We are all sinners and we are all guilty before God (Romans 3:10–23). No one can satisfy God's law and circumcision and other law-works fail to bring justification. *A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified* (16).

The glorious message of the gospel is that there is a way for a man to be righteous before God! Christ, through his perfect obedience and death, satisfied God's law (Romans 3:24–25; 5:6–9, 17–19). He became a curse for us (3:13), the debt of our sin being imputed to him (that is, 'put to his account' so that he was punished in our place; cp. Isaiah 53:5–6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18). The righteousness of the Lord Jesus is imputed to us so that our salvation does not depend on our works (Romans 4:3–5, 22–25; 5:19).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism describes justification in this way: 'Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.' **All the religious activity in the world cannot save us! We must in faith cast ourselves upon Christ and call on him to save us. We are not justified on account of our faith, but by means of faith.** J.I. Packer writes, 'Faith is the outstretched empty hand which receives righteousness by receiving Christ' (GOD'S WORDS, page 143).

Paul was concerned that the Galatians recognized the peril of a *different gospel* (1:6). The Reformers fought to re-establish the vital truth of justification by faith alone. Many men and women foolishly imagine that they can earn salvation. Let us be absolutely firm and clear in our defence of the gospel.