

# The Young People's Magazine

Vol 70

December 2005

No 12

## No Hope for the Future?

Robert Fisk is a journalist who works in the Middle East. In a career which has stretched over many years, he has covered many gruesome events. But he is now finding it more difficult to cope with them. While working in Baghdad in August, he saw many dead bodies, including women and children, brought into a mortuary; he confesses: "I don't find it as easy to see as I used to". He has recently written a massive volume called, *The Great War for Civilisation*. He comments: "After about page 200, it's an unrelieved document of pain, torture, injustice and genocide". Which means that there is a huge amount of grim reading, as the book is all of 1366 pages long. And there is a vast number of desperate cruelties to record, no matter what period of history a writer may choose to look at.

After all that he has seen of man's cruelty to man, Fisk looks into the future without hope. Speaking recently to the Cambridge University Union, he admitted: "I have nothing optimistic to tell you". And perhaps we should not be too surprised at this journalist's grim outlook on the future. We have just emerged from a century when far more were killed in war than ever before. Besides two world wars, and many smaller ones in various continents, there were the fearful concentration camps of Hitler's Germany and of Stalin's Russia, where many more millions of human beings perished.

And in the twenty-first century the killing and the cruelty goes on. Scarcely a day goes by without us hearing reports of repeated killings in Iraq, for instance. Again and again, we read of explosions leading to severe loss of life – often the work of Islamic suicide bombers. To list only a few examples, there was the fearful slaughter on the Indonesian island of Bali two years ago, and on the London underground in July this year, and in Bali again in October. And as we look around us, there indeed seems nothing to give us any cause for optimism.

But should this surprise us in a fallen world, a world where the true God is so much rejected? Yet, if God did not restrain sin, the state of this world would be far worse than it is. Civilisation is only possible because God, in His providence, restrains people from sinning more than they do. Perhaps we

should only be surprised that things are not far worse than they are and that, in so many parts of the world, people can live a peaceful life. We should certainly be thankful if we share in such a blessing.

As we look around this fallen world, we again and again see violence and brutality, and no one can say how much worse such situations may become. We see God so often ignored and so often despised. And if God is mentioned, we are usually assured in the next breath that it does not matter what god we worship. Can we expect the true God to rescue such a world as this from the calamities that its people so easily create in their hatred of others? What grounds can we possibly have for hope?

Yet, if we open our Bibles, we will indeed find real cause for hope. Look at Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord". See how, when the Lord spoke to him, Saul at once submitted. Such was the power of the Holy Spirit, when He began to work in his heart, that Saul could not resist for one moment. Immediately he was asking, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The threatenings and slaughter had vanished. No longer could Saul of Tarsus, with raging enmity in his heart against Christ, persecute the disciples.

Look now at King Manasseh, who was probably the wickedest ruler that Judah ever had to endure. So vicious was he against his own people that the Bible tells us: "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another". Yet it was possible, even for Manasseh, to have his evil heart renewed by the all-powerful work of the Holy Spirit. He was taken as a prisoner of war to Babylon. And there, "when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him. . . . Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God." What a wonderful change!

This power of the Holy Spirit is what can give us optimism as we look around a violent world. This is why we may have good grounds for hope when nothing else can brighten the outlook. God is still the same; He can change the hearts of the worst of men when He is pleased to apply His Word to them. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth", Christ told His disciples before He left this world. But though He is no longer physically present, He works by the Holy Spirit. His power is unlimited. It is not too difficult for Him to save the most wicked individuals. Not even Satan can prevent the Lord converting those who are leaders in violence.

But look once more at the testimony of the Word of God. See what He promises to do: "He shall judge among the nations . . . and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more".

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What a wonderful age it will be when guns and bombs and other armaments are turned to peaceful uses!

As we look around the world today, such a prospect seems highly unlikely. But it will happen; God has promised, and He will never break His word. The fact is that, if we do not accept the testimony of God’s Word, the outlook is intensely bleak. On the other hand, if we believe what God says in His Word, the outlook is very hopeful indeed. Though we cannot say when such wonderful changes will take place, they are certain to happen, and they will be the result of the gospel being proclaimed throughout the various countries of the world. That was why Christ also told His disciples, before He ascended to heaven: “Go ye into all the world, and *preach the gospel to every creature*. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

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## “I Am Ready”

Lisa von Hersche was not quite seven. Her mother had died five years before then and she lived with her father in Antwerp, where he was the mayor. It was 1560 and it was a dangerous time for people like the von Hersches, who were Protestants. Antwerp was then part of the Netherlands, which was under the control of Spain, a staunchly Roman Catholic country. The Roman Church and the Government called the Protestants heretics and were determined to wipe them out.

Lisa’s father took pains to teach her about what he believed. She would sit on his knee for hours as he patiently explained to her why people so much hated the Protestant religion. While he was away on official duties, Lisa would sit by the window watching groups of soldiers in the streets looking for heretics.

One lovely spring morning, Lisa watched her father walking down the street. She sensed that there was something wrong. She suspected, rightly, that the soldiers were planning to arrest him that day. She met him at the door and, with her big, blue, frightened eyes, looked up into his face.

He lifted her up lovingly in his arms and whispered to her: “Lisa, my time has come. The Saviour has called, and I am ready.” He was telling her what she already suspected. Lisa did not want to lose her father, so she said to him, “Father, quick, this way”. Slipping her hand into his, she led him up the wide stair till they reached the attic, where there was a large chest made of oak. Without speaking, Lisa looked up to him. Clearly, she wanted him to hide in the chest.

"No, Lisa, my darling, I cannot. The soldiers will have no mercy on you if I disappear."

"Father, please do it for my sake," Lisa pled with him.

Just then there was a loud knocking at their front door. Lisa gently pushed her father towards the chest and ran out of the room. As she did so, she touched a secret spring in the wall and a panel closed over the door, so that no one would notice it. Then she went downstairs. Lisa's hands trembled as she pulled back the heavy bolts on the front door. She opened the door and about six soldiers walked in.

Lisa was in tears as one of the men asked her roughly, "Little one, where is your father, that old hypocrite?"

She did not answer. And the soldier swore as he repeated the question.

Now Lisa asked him, "Do you think I would tell you?"

"My thoughts are not your business", he told her gruffly and then asked again, "Where have you put him?"

"I cannot tell you", Lisa told him.

"Then we will find him", he told her confidently.

The soldiers went everywhere in the house, looking in every corner. But they did not find him, in spite of their confidence. Lisa sat at the bottom of the staircase trembling as she listened carefully to every sound.

The soldiers were now angrier than ever; they were perfectly sure that Lisa's father was somewhere in the house. The soldier who had questioned her before marched up to her again. He put his hand on his sword and told her to tell him where her father was hiding. He promised, probably dishonestly, that he would not harm her father. But she said nothing. At last the soldier lost his patience and threatened her. "Then", he told her, "I will kill you instead".

Lisa trembled for a moment and then she became perfectly calm. "Please," she asked, "may I have one moment first." The soldier gave her permission. Lisa went down on her knees and prayed. When she was finished, she lifted her face and said, "I am ready".

No one spoke. Then the soldier lifted Lisa up as he tried to smother a sob, and he kissed her again and again. "I had such a little one once," he explained to the other soldiers, "but she is gone. I do not know where. I cannot harm this one for her sake. Let us go."

And they did. They all left the house, moved by Lisa's determination to die instead of her father. They could not understand why she was not afraid. They did not understand what happens at death, but we are told that Lisa saw death only as "the opening to a life eternal, perfect in its love and happiness". It is wonderful that God protected Lisa and her father from being killed.

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But it is even more wonderful that He kept them from giving up their faith.

Clearly Antwerp was no place for Lisa and her father to live in any longer. And nothing more is known about them except that, just a week later, they were on their way across the sea to England, where it was safe to worship God according to the Bible.

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## How Did it all Begin?

### 3. Our Seven-Day Week

As we know from God's Word, God created the universe in six days. We are told in Genesis chapter 1 what was created on each day. We are also given a summary in the Shorter Catechism: "The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the word of His power, in the space of six days, and all very good" (answer 9).

People who believe that the universe evolved purely by chance deny that God created the universe. There are some other people who do believe that God created all things but not in six days. They say that God took a long time to create the world and that the word *day* just represents millions, or even billions, of years. The reason for this is that they are trying to match up what the Bible teaches with what most scientists believe – that the universe is billions of years old.

In our language the word *day* can have different meanings. For instance, you could say, "During Queen Victoria's *day* . . .", meaning a period of time covering the reign of Queen Victoria. Another way that *day* can be used is: "My Dad works at night and sleeps during the *day*", meaning the portion of time associated with daylight. Another use is: "In four *days*' time it will be my birthday"; here *day* means a period of 24 hours. So when the word *day* is used in Genesis chapter 1, what meaning does it have?

If we look at the word *day* as it is used in Genesis 1, the original Hebrew word is *yom* (yowm). This word has a variety of meanings, just like *day* can have in our language. It may mean: the period of time associated with daylight hours, a 24-hour period, or some space of time. Just as, in our language, we get clues for what the word *day* means from the words around it – the context – so we have to look at the context of this word as it is used in Genesis 1.

The word *yom* is used, with a number, 410 times in other places in the Bible, and in each of these places it means a normal day. Here are two examples from the 410 similar uses of the word: "Upon the *thirteenth day* of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar" (Esther 8:12), "And it came

to pass that on the *sixth day* they gathered twice as much bread" (Exodus 16:22). This leads us to conclude that, when this word is used with a number in Genesis 1, it also means a normal day.

If we read the actual words in Genesis 1, each day of creation is numbered, and mentioned along with the words "evening and morning" – again emphasising that a normal day, lasting 24 hours, is meant. For example: "And the evening and the morning were the fourth day" (Genesis 1:19). In the other places in the Bible where the word *yom* is used, it appears with the words *morning and evening* 23 times. Also, *evening and morning* appear together without the word *yom* 38 times. This makes a total of 61 times in other places in the Bible when *evening and morning* are used to describe a normal day of 24 hours. This strongly suggests to us that, when these words are used in Genesis 1, they also refer to a normal 24-hour day. It is important to note that there are other Hebrew words which are used in different places in the Bible to refer to long periods of unspecified time. None of these is used in Genesis 1.

But what is the problem in not believing literally what God has told us in Genesis 1? God has given us His Word and He has put it into a context to help us learn the truth. It is dangerous to try to understand God's Word without paying attention to the context He has put it into; otherwise we are trying to make it fit in with the ideas we already have. If we go wrong like this, our view of the meaning of God's Word will change, depending on what ideas are in fashion at the time.

If we say that God actually took billions of years to create the world, this means that some creatures died before Adam was created. This is contrary to what the Bible teaches about death, suffering and disease coming as a result of Adam's first sin. When He had finished creating the world, God declared that "it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). He would not have done so if millions of animals had already died and death had polluted His perfect creation. If the account of six-day creation is not accepted as truth, the account of Adam's first sin will not be taken as truth; and so begins a course of questioning the truth and reality of everything in the Word of God.

It is most accurate to interpret God's Word by contrasting and comparing it to other parts of His Word and by looking at its context. In doing so we should strive to be like the people of Berea, who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

God created the universe in six days. "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day" (Genesis 2:2). Does this mean God rested for billions of years? Of course it does not.

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God was establishing the pattern of a seven-day week which mankind has followed from the beginning of time. God explicitly affirmed six-day creation when He delivered the Fourth Commandment to Moses on Mount Sinai: “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day” (Exodus 20:11).

The way that time is measured in days, months and years can be traced back to natural cycles such as the moon rotating around the earth and the earth rotating round the sun. Changes have been made to the calendar as different civilisations have tried to impose the structure they felt was best. However, there is no astronomical basis for the seven-day week, and the best explanation is that it follows the pattern of the creation week. It is interesting to note that attempts to change the length of week have failed. At the end of the eighteenth century, during the French Revolution, there was an attempt to make it longer, and the Soviet Union tried to shorten it in the 1930s, but in both cases the seven-day week was brought back.

*S M Campbell*

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## The Angel of the Covenant

### 2. Appearing to Abraham

*Rev Angus Smith*

The first article introduced the idea of a theophany as an appearance of God in human nature. These were appearances of the Son of God, who was to come into the world as man. The article ended with the first clear theophany – the first appearance of the Angel of the Lord to Abram.

**I**n Genesis 14 we see Abram caught up in warfare, when invaders took parts of Canaan by surprise and carried off much spoil. Abram with 318 trained servants overcame the invaders, so that the land of Canaan was now virtually Abram’s. But his rejection of gifts from the wicked king of Sodom sets the tone of the account. Despite temptation to have the land in some other way, Abram would take possession of it only in one way – as the covenant gift of God. We stress again that the Angel of Jehovah is the Angel of the Covenant. God was making an actual covenant with Abram, which included all the promises made in chapter 12; it was a covenant of grace. Abram is the focal point from which all spiritual blessings have reached all parts of the world. Spiritual blessing must begin with faith; and if we have the same saving faith as Abram, we share in his blessings, for all believers in the world today are his spiritual children. (See the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.)

In the next chapter Abram told God that he was childless; he referred to his slave as his heir, because God had given him no seed. God told him to look

at the stars, which he could not count, and assured him that his seed would be like them in number. Abram asked the Lord to show him the certainty of inheriting the land of Canaan.

The Lord responded by commanding him to take a heifer, a she goat and a ram, as well as a turtle dove and a young pigeon. He was to kill them and to divide the animals so as to leave a passage between the halves, the birds remaining undivided. The Angel of the Lord passed between the parts to signify and emphasise the covenant He had made with Abram. Abram had to drive flesh-eating birds away from the sacrifices while he waited, which of itself was an indication that he believed God's promise and, by faith, could wait for them to be fulfilled. At night he slept and was overcome by a horror of great darkness. The Angel interpreted this for him, indicating that his seed – for he would have children – would be greatly afflicted for 400 years in a strange land but would then inherit their own promised land.

The sun went down and Abram saw a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passing between the pieces, which we take to be the Angel of the Lord, in the form of the Shekinah, accepting the sacrifices and confirming His covenant – one of pure grace. Elsewhere in Scripture we are given the impression that, at times, when men made a covenant, the practice was for both parties to pass between the divided parts, as in Jeremiah 34:18, but here it does not seem as though Abram, as a party to the covenant, did so. It was a covenant of total condescension and grace, and also an indication of atonement, which was from God alone, and so this was a shadow of good things to come.

The next reference to the Angel of the Lord is in Genesis 16, when Sarai stumbled, through not believing God's promise of numberless descendants, leading Abram also into the same trap. He foolishly agreed when Sarai desired to give him her personal slave-maid Hagar as a means of obtaining children. Hagar conceived and began to despise her mistress, who then blamed Abram for the situation in the home. Abram told Sarai that she could do as she chose with Hagar, so Sarai dealt roughly with her. Hagar then fled, but the Angel of the Lord found her by a well in the wilderness. He commanded her to return and submit to her mistress. The question arises why this Egyptian slave should have the benefit of a theophany. The answer could be that she was part of Abram's household, who were taught in the things of the Lord and probably knew of the covenant promises.

Genesis 17 records how the Lord appeared to Abram, 13 years after the birth of Ishmael, Hagar's son. This was a further test of faith, for Abraham was now 99 years of age. But deferring the birth of the promised son may also have been in the nature of a chastisement from God for the lack of faith shown in the episode involving Ishmael. We do not know how He appeared,

but He stressed the covenant once more, and revealed that Abram would be a father of many nations. To certify this, He changed his name from Abram (which means *exalted father*) to Abraham (*father of a multitude*).

From this time Abraham was to circumcise every male belonging to him, and also every male child eight days after he was born. This was a seal of the faith which Abraham had in God and His covenant, and was also a pledge of God's special relationship to his posterity. In Romans 4:11, we read that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised: that righteousness might be imputed to them also". Sarai's name was changed to Sarah (*princess*), for she would be a mother of nations and kings. She was to have a son whose name should be Isaac. We notice too that the Lord presented Himself under a new name, El Shaddai (*the Almighty God*), as a means of strengthening Abram's faith in old age when it seemed impossible for him and his wife to have children.

Shortly after this, the Lord appeared to Abraham on the plain of Mamre. Abraham saw three men – the Angel of the Lord and two created angels, in human form. Their feet were washed as a token of welcome, food and shade were provided for them. The Angel then promised Abraham a son in the very near future, but Sarah laughed in unbelief, as she and Abraham were so old. Although she was hidden inside the tent, the Angel knew her action and rebuked her, although she denied laughing. Later on, when she had the child, she said in faith: "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me" (Genesis 21:6).

"Is anything too hard for the Lord", asked the covenant Angel. The name Isaac, meaning *Laughter*, the laughter of true faith, was given to the child, and reverberates in the faith of the Church throughout all generations. As Abraham was now close to the Lord in covenant obedience, the Lord exclaimed, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement" (Genesis 18:19). Elsewhere we read, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him: and He will show them His covenant" (Psalm 25:14). As His covenant friend, the Lord revealed to Abraham not only good to himself but also the destruction of Sodom, which involved his relatives. This meeting between the Angel of the Lord and Abraham seems to indicate that Abraham was well acquainted with this form of appearing. He, an old man, even ran out to meet the Angel as if he recognised Him. It reminds us of the future hospitality to be given to the Angel, when in our nature, by the two sisters of Bethany. The same worshipful spirit is there.

## The Book of Ruth

### 84. "Like Rachel and Like Leah"

*Rev Keith M Watkins*

Ruth 4:11a. "And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel."

When Boaz married Ruth, the people of Bethlehem prayed. They knew that there should always be prayer for God's blessing on such an important event. They prayed that Ruth would be a housebuilder "like Rachel and like Leah", the two wives of Jacob, who built the nation of Israel. All 12 tribes of Israel came from those two women, along with their two handmaids.

Why did the people of Bethlehem want Ruth to be like Rachel and Leah? It was because they saw similarities between the way Rachel and Leah had built the house of Israel and the way they wanted Ruth to build the house of Boaz.

For one thing, a time came when Rachel and Leah left their own country on account of their husband. They left the house of Laban their father for the sake of the house of Jacob. They left their own family to join with Jacob's family. They left their own people to join the people of Jacob. Through all these things, they built the house of Israel.

Ruth the Moabitess did the same. When Orpah went back to her land, her people and her gods, Ruth refused to do so. She said to Naomi her mother-in-law, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (1:16). And now Ruth had found a husband in her adopted country. After forsaking everything, let her now be fruitful – to build her husband's house.

It is the same with the Lord's people. When they come to Christ as their gospel Husband, they turn away from their old life and start a completely new one. It is as if they have gone to live in another country altogether. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him" (Psalm 45:10,11). This has the closest possible connection with their fruitfulness. The more separated they are from the old life of sin, and the more closely united they are to Christ their new Husband, the more He uses them to build His house, the Church.

As soon as they are married to Christ, we should pray that God's people

would be like Rachel and Leah. In other words, we should pray that the Lord would enable them more and more to deny themselves, to forsake whatever hinders their usefulness in His cause, and so be fruitful in building His kingdom.

It is instructive that Rachel is mentioned first, even though Leah was Jacob's first wife, the elder sister, the first to start building the house of Israel, the more fruitful of the two, and the mother of Judah – and Bethlehem was part of that tribe. So there were many reasons for the people to mention Leah first. But they mentioned Rachel first. Why was that?

For one thing, Leah bore children more easily and more plentifully than Rachel. It was Rachel who had to learn the hard lesson that children come only from the Lord. Rachel was the one who had to struggle with barrenness. "When Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die" (Genesis 30:1). Jacob replied, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" (verse 2). Rachel learnt the hard way that "children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalm 127:3). Throughout her first marriage, Ruth also had been childless. But now the people wanted her to be fruitful like Rachel was in the end. So they prayed earnestly for that.

Sometimes the Church is like Leah, and spiritual children come quickly and in great numbers, as she said when Gad was born: "A troop cometh" (Genesis 30:11). But often she is like Rachel and Ruth. For a long time, even for many years, she seems to be barren, and to have no spiritual children, no conversions to Christ. This makes her weep, and plead with the Lord like Rachel did with Jacob: "Give me children". Often this prayer is answered in the end, as it was for Ruth and Rachel, when the Lord "maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children" (Psalm 113:9). The Church has to learn that if the Lord does not build the house, she labours in vain (see Psalm 127:1). But when the Lord gives the increase, then she rejoices like Rachel and Ruth: "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife" (Isaiah 54:1).

Jacob did not stop loving Rachel because of her barrenness. She remained close to his heart. Perhaps the people of Bethlehem were afraid that it might be long before Ruth bore children. After all, her first marriage had been childless. If she was long in bearing children for Boaz, they wanted her still to enjoy his love, as Rachel had enjoyed Jacob's love.

As long as the Church is faithful to her Saviour, she still basks in His love and favour, even if He does not presently use her to build His house. Even

if her evangelism is not successful, He delights in her faithfulness. He remembers that for His sake she has laboured and not fainted (Revelation 2:3). We should pray for the Church to be kept faithful to her Saviour in the assurance of His love, even in a day of small things like our own.

Rachel may also be mentioned first because of her connection with Bethlehem. In giving birth to Benjamin, her second son, she lost her life. And where did that happen? "Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem" (Genesis 35:19). With her grave among them, the people of Bethlehem could not forget that Rachel had given her life to build the house of Israel. They saw that Ruth's situation was similar. She came to Bethlehem, to die and be buried there (see 1:17). Now she had given herself to Boaz, to spend her life in building his house. The people's prayer showed that they did not want her to be disappointed.

It is like this for the Lord's people. Building the Church with Christ can cost them everything. Paul said that he spent himself in the work. Many have endured much hardness and suffering, even death, in their endeavours to be used by Christ for building His Church. They have denied themselves and their own lives, to be mothers to sinners. Only eternity will tell how the Lord has used the sufferings, deprivations and even the martyrdoms of His people to build His kingdom. There are stories of persecutors converted by the witness of the very Christians they were torturing. Like Rachel, their deaths issued in life for others. Even in less extreme cases, believers will pass through much self-denial – dying to self – when working with Christ to build His kingdom. In this way, they will be like Rachel who gave her life to build Jacob's house. We should pray that they would "very gladly spend and be spent" (2 Corinthians 12:15) in order to build the Lord's house.

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*For Junior Readers*

## **The Future**

**I**nvest in the future," proclaimed the big sign by the roadside; "that's where you are going to spend the rest of your life." I think the advert was trying to encourage people to save for pensions. But the advice could also be taken in a spiritual way, couldn't it?

As you come to the end of another year, you look back and recall some of the things you have done, or the special events you have enjoyed. But they are all over. They are gone. They are now in the past.

And what about the present? It only lasts for a moment. Tomorrow it will be in the past as well!

Surely then it is good advice to prepare for the future. The Bible tells us that our whole life is “even a vapour [steam], that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away”. Life is so soon past, but so important! As a godly man wrote about our time in this world: “It is important; yes all-important, by reason of its relation to another, and an eternal, state. It is not only an introduction to this state, but a preparation for it . . . as the sowing for the harvest. Our thoughts, words and actions are the seed; and ‘whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap’.” Is that not like investing in the future? Devoting your time, your youth, to preparing for eternity?

The Apostle Paul gives this advice in his first letter to Timothy. He says that people in this life should be “laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life”. In other words, you must prepare for eternity – invest in the future! You have a never-dying soul; it will never, ever go out of existence. And eternal life is offered to you in the Bible. Jesus says, “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.”

*J van Kralingen*

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## Advice to Young Believers

*Ebenezer Erskine*

Some brief advice which one of Scotland’s most spiritual ministers gave at the end of a communion service.

Now, because there are some young folk that have been at the Lord’s table who never were at it before, I conclude with a word or two to them.

1. “Keep yourselves from idols.” Let nothing occupy God’s room in your heart.
2. Keep and save yourselves from a “present evil world”, so that you may not be seduced or entangled with snares.
3. Be on your guard; for the devil will be on you; he will seek to sift and winnow you and to draw you back to his service.
4. “Put on the whole armour of God”, and be often proving it, also “the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit”.
5. Keep Christ, the captain of salvation, always in your eye, so that you may be supplied, strengthened and enlightened.
6. Be much on your knees at a throne of grace “for grace and mercy to help [you] in time of need”.
7. Be much in studying your own emptiness and Christ’s fulness, and travel continually between these two.

*For Younger Readers*

## God Hears Prayer

**I**t was a time when all ships were moved along through the water by the wind filling their sails. A ship was sailing home when she met a storm. The wind was high and the ship was badly damaged.

The sailors were very worried; they were afraid that their ship would sink. Most of them were working hard at the pumps. Water was leaking into the ship and they were trying hard to pump the water out. But however hard they worked at the pumps, the water was rising slowly inside the boat.

The captain warned everyone that they were in great danger; he did not expect the ship to stay afloat for much longer. The mate on this ship did not care about God or His commandments (the mate is the most important seaman after the captain). But the mate was very worried that evening. As he walked on the deck of the ship, he looked again and again at his watch.

"We are lost", the captain told him; "the ship can't live much longer in such a gale."

But the mate did not pay much attention to him. He just looked at his watch oftener than ever. At last he shouted happily: "We are safe! We cannot now be lost!"

Some of the other men asked why he acted as he did. And he told them: "It is my father's time of prayer. He is praying to God now for me. The ship can never sink while my father's prayers are going up to heaven."

His words encouraged the rest of the crew and they worked even harder to pump the water out of the boat. The water stopped rising and the ship stayed afloat. At last the wind went down and the ship sailed safely home.

The mate was right. God did hear his father's prayers. God was very good to the mate.

But how strange that he did not pray himself! Probably he had stopped praying long before then, because he did not really care about God.

How very sinful! We should always pray to God.

# **The Young People's Magazine**

**2005  
Volume 70**

Editor: Rev Kenneth D Macleod

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them (Ecclesiastes 12:1)*

**Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland**

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## Looking Around Us

### “Thou God Seest Me”

Exam boards in England have been complaining bitterly about pupils’ “blatant copying of material from the internet” in some of the coursework submitted for this year’s GCSE English. Examiners were finding several paragraphs beginning with exactly the same sentences, and the paragraphs arranged in identical order. They warned that, if candidates were found to have cheated, they would always be reported and in serious cases they would probably be disqualified.

To present someone else’s work as one’s own is clearly dishonest. There are obviously cases where students are at liberty to quote, for instance, other writers’ opinions, but these should be clearly acknowledged. In this and everything else we do, we should be conscious that all our actions, and even our motives, are open to the eyes of the God with whom we have to do. Hagar’s words, “Thou God seest me”, should always be in our minds, and they should influence how we act.

### A Heathen Symbol

It is estimated that British people will spend £1700 million on Christmas cards and decorations this year, almost all of which will very quickly find its way onto a rubbish tip. That includes £27 for the average Briton to buy a Christmas tree, leaving out those who have an artificial one.

Probably a tree is not a great expense for most families today, but there is a far stronger reason for objecting to it. It is a heathen symbol attached to what is, at bottom, a heathen festival.

Long before the birth of Christ, there was a festival at the end of the year to honour the birth of the son of Babylon’s queen of heaven. This festival was taken over by the Church in Rome, which attached Christ’s name to it. Roman myths told of the mother of the Sun-God being changed into a tree and, in that state, bringing forth her divine son. So, when the Romans celebrated the winter solstice, when the sun is at its lowest, they made use of a fir tree. The sun, they supposed, after falling before his enemies, had risen triumphant over them all – now that it began to rise again in the sky. Thus December 25 was observed as the day when the victorious god reappeared on earth; it was the birthday of the unconquered sun. And the Christmas tree represents the slain god come to life again.

So this tree is obviously not a suitable symbol for Christian homes, even although very few homes in Britain are without one. Indeed the whole idea of Christmas is not appropriate for a Christian family.

## An Invitation

This poem calling young people to Christ is based on the words: "I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me" (Proverbs 8:17).

Come, while the blossoms of thy years are brightest,  
Thou youthful wanderer in a flowery maze;  
Come, while the restless heart is bounding lightest,  
And joy's pure sunbeams tremble on thy ways;  
Come, while sweet thoughts, like summer buds unfolding,  
Waken rich feelings in the careless breast,  
While yet thy hand the short-lived wreath is holding,  
Come and secure eternal rest.

Soon will the freshness of thy days be over,  
And thy free buoyancy of soul be flown;  
Pleasure will fold her wing, and friend and lover  
Will to the embraces of the grave be gone.  
Those who now bless thee will have passed for ever;  
Their looks of kindness will be lost to thee;  
Thou wilt need balm to heal thy spirit's fever,  
And thy sick heart broods over years to be!

Come, while the morning of thy life is glowing,  
Ere the dim phantoms thou art chasing die,  
Ere the glad spell, which earth is round thee throwing,  
Fades like the crimson from a sunset sky.  
Life is but shadows, save a promise given  
Which lights up sorrow with a fadeless ray.  
O, touch the sceptre – with a hope in heaven –  
Come, turn thy spirit from the world away.

Then will the crosses of this brief existence  
Seem airy nothings to thine ardent soul.  
And shining brightly in the forward distance,  
Will of thy patient race appear the goal;  
Home of the weary, where, in peace reposing,  
The spirit lingers in unclouded bliss.  
Though o'er its dust the curtained grave is closing,  
Who would not early choose a lot like this?

*R M M'Cheyne*