

# The Young People's Magazine

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## Leaving Ur

Abraham lived in the important city of Ur. It was by no means a primitive city. Excavations there have discovered, for instance, elaborate tombs built using blocks of limestone which seem to have been brought from the desert, about 30 miles away. In one of these graves, archaeologists found the remains of a queen who was buried in an elaborate headdress made from gold and ornamental stones. Other objects also showed that the people of Ur had a high level of skill in manufacture and art. It was obviously a desirable place to live – if one thought only of the things of this life. But it was a city where idolatry flourished, a centre of the worship of the moon god.

One day, the Bible tells us, “the God of glory” appeared to Abraham, probably in a vision, and told him that he must leave his country. But God did not tell Abraham where he was to go. Although Abraham and his family could, presumably, have gone on living in considerable comfort if they had stayed on in Ur, he obeyed. It must have seemed strange to be told to leave the place where he had been born, where he had grown up, where he had set up home with his wife Sarah, and to head out into the unknown. But Abraham did what God told him; he did not hesitate because of questions which would likely have arisen in his mind, such as: Where would they find food? Would there always be water available? Would there be unknown enemies to face?

Clearly, Abraham had seen something of the majesty of God; he was convinced that this was the true God. So he knew that all the gods he had worshipped all his life were false gods, whom it was sinful to respect any longer. He believed in God; by faith he recognised that God's words were true, and that they had authority. Even although he did not know where God was telling him to go, Abraham did know that it was the height of wisdom to obey – indeed, it was the *only* safe course. But it was extremely dangerous, and wrong, to disobey.

Perhaps, as Abraham and some of his relations were leaving Ur for ever, he met a man whom he knew. This man might have asked Abraham, “Where are you going?” If Abraham answered, “I don't know”, he would have

sounded very foolish. And the man would probably not have believed Abraham if he added, "The God of glory appeared to me and told me that He will give me a land somewhere, but he has not yet told me where". But Abraham was not foolish; God is the faithful God, the God who cannot lie. So Abraham could trust God to lead him on safely to the land which he had been promised – wherever it might be. The God of glory had spoken, and there was nothing so safe for Abraham to do as to obey.

God does not appear to people in visions today. There is no need for visions now that God has given us the Bible. Through its teachings, He directs sinners everywhere to do something very similar to what Abraham was told to do. They are to leave Satan's kingdom, where they have lived all their lives. So God is calling on you and everyone else who hears the gospel to set out on a spiritual journey toward heaven, though this, of course, need not involve leaving the place where you live or anything like that. Those who by faith set out on that journey may find everything so new that they scarcely know where they are going. But God has promised to be with them and to take care of them, just as He promised to bless Abraham when he left Ur. And He has promised to lead on to the end of their journey all those who trust in Him; He will bring them safely at last to heaven.

When sinners set out on their journey to heaven, their old friends may meet them and ask, "Why are you not coming with us now to the pleasures we used to enjoy together? Why are you leaving us?" And, rather like Abraham, they may say: "We have met the God of glory. We have seen His majesty. He has called us to set out on the way to heaven, and we must obey. It is the only sensible way through life. We can trust God to lead us on safely even when we do not know what we should do."

When they saw the majesty of God, they began – like Saul on the road to Damascus – to ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" God has given them new hearts, and they now want to do what He wants them to do. They no longer want to follow their own ways; they no longer want to act like the world; they no longer want to do the will of the devil. Their old friends may tell them how foolish they are to give up dancing and drinking and partying, or whatever worldly pleasures helped to keep them secure in Satan's kingdom. But they have begun to see that God has promised them better pleasures – pleasures that will never come to an end. They are now able to enjoy the Word of God; they can have spiritual delight in hearing about Jesus Christ and the wonderful work He did in providing salvation for sinners. That is something which will give them enjoyment to all eternity as, in heaven, they learn more and more about that work. There they will sing, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us

kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” And they will sing these words with far greater enjoyment than they ever had in any of the foolish, and often obviously sinful, songs that are so much part of youth culture today.

The man whom Abraham met outside Ur might have gone on to say how foolish he was to leave behind all the comforts of Ur. He might have asked Abraham how, for instance, he could be sure that he would find pasture for his sheep and cattle. And Abraham would no doubt have told him that God, who had called him out, knew all about these things. Abraham could trust in God to provide for him in the unknown way. And so should we.

Abraham’s friend might also have asked: “Do you need to go away so soon? Do you need to be in such a hurry? Surely you could spend at least a few more years enjoying yourself with your friends in Ur.” And Abraham would have to say something like this: “I dare not despise the God of glory like that. To delay going to the land He has promised to give me would be to despise Him. To disobey, even for a short time, would be sinful. I have seen a little of His majesty, and I must obey Him. I know that what He has promised is true and I must trust Him.”

So when your friends see you turning away from the sinful activities which you once very much enjoyed, remember the God of glory. Remember what Abraham would have said to any of his friends who might try to persuade him to delay leaving Ur. Do not turn back to the world. It might very easily suck you into its ways again. Do not provoke God to leave you to these ways if you find them becoming attractive again. Remember that these are dangerous ways; they are part of the broad road that leads to eternal destruction. You must flee, without delay, from the wrath to come. And that means fleeing from the sins which deserve God’s wrath – fleeing to Christ, who is the only Saviour.

Satan will do all in his power to prevent sinners leaving his kingdom to set out for heaven. And he will use anybody he can find to persuade them that a life of sin is better than a life of godliness. He is totally unscrupulous; he will do anything to tempt people to follow the ways of the world and keep away from the path that leads to everlasting blessedness. He knows how to make his temptations sound convincing. And if you feel almost persuaded to give up seeking salvation and to go back to the world, remember that you are to “resist the devil”. But remember too that he is powerful; remember that you cannot resist him in your own strength. You must cry to God for strength, and for grace to go on in the right way. Remember that King Jesus is infinitely stronger than Satan, and He is able to bring you safely to heaven – just as He brought Abraham safely to the promised land.

## Religion in Eastern Europe

### 2. The Orthodox Churches

*Rev David Campbell*

Last month's article looked at the effects of the Reformation in Eastern Europe. Although some good work was done in these countries, very little of it survived. This article considers the dominance of the Eastern Orthodox Churches there.

The Eastern Church split from the Roman Church of the West in 1054 – when a dispute arose over the doctrine of the Holy Spirit – and was based in Constantinople (now Istanbul, in Turkey). The doctrines, worship and practices of Orthodoxy came to Russia in 988 AD when the Regent Olga and her son Prince Vladimir received the Christian faith; they had the heathen people of the nation baptised by the Orthodox Church. In the fourteenth century, the centre of the Russian Orthodox Church moved to Moscow from Kiev in Ukraine, but it was not until the next century that this Church became independent of Constantinople. During the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725), when the Russian Empire was established, the Church was restricted in its powers and became a department of the state. There was constant tension with the state until the Soviet Revolution in 1917, when it began to suffer persecution. During the twentieth century, the Russian Orthodox Church, the biggest of such Churches, became a tool of the Communists and complied with state policy. It is at present recognised as the state Church of Russia; so it has power to influence policies which affect other Churches.

(1.) **Doctrine.** The doctrines of Orthodoxy are very similar to those of the Roman Catholic Church, but it rejects the truth that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son. Most notably, these Churches have the same doctrine of Justification, which calls into question the Christianity of all who remain in this communion. The people are taught that justification is the result of grace wrought in the soul, and grace is there partly because of human ability, rather than by the work of Christ. They confuse justification with regeneration and give human ability pride of place in salvation. It follows that their doctrine of sin and the Fall is defective, as is their doctrine of the atoning death of Christ. Like Rome, they give the tradition of the Church the same degree of authority as the Scriptures, but in practice they give tradition a higher place. So, as Christ said of the Pharisees, they “make the word of God of none effect” by their traditions.

The Orthodox Church's doctrine of the future state is also seriously defective, as they hold to the notion of purgatory. This doctrine of a state in between this world and heaven, through which men pass after death to purge away their sins, undermines the truths of the gospel. More dangerous still is

their idea that good works actually merit the favour of God. This naturally flows from a wrong view of justification; it is the error of Rome and of every other false religion. The Orthodox believer holds that his works, when he strictly follows the rules laid down by the Church, not only merit God's favour, but actually make him more holy.

Their doctrine of the sacraments differs from that of Rome in that the Orthodox Church denies transubstantiation – the false idea that the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper are changed into the actual body and blood of Christ. Yet they do hold that the actual elements of the Lord's Supper have some physical value for those who partake of them. They also have a doctrine of baptismal regeneration – the unscriptural teaching that people are born again by being baptised. Like Rome, they also hold – against Scripture – that there are five other sacraments.

(2.) *Worship*. The worship of the Orthodox Church is corrupted by the idolatrous adoration of icons – usually pictures of “saints”. This practice became very prominent in the thirteenth century among Russian monks and ever since it has been a very powerful instrument in Satan's hand to blind souls in superstition and will-worship. In defence of this practice, the Orthodox Church claims that it does not worship the icon, yet in reality people are looking for some spiritual experience of God through it; they treat the icon as sacred, requiring religious adoration. Many consider the idolatry of the Orthodox Church to be considerably worse than the Roman Church, and certainly their places of worship are literally crammed full of idols. The worship of the Virgin Mary is also given a very prominent place.

When the Orthodox priest prays, he often chants the same phrase over and over, thinking he will be heard for his much speaking. Prayer is viewed, not as the act of a sinner coming to the throne of grace for mercy, but rather as a work which has merit and must be performed accurately if God is to accept it. The priest also professes to bless people, places and even animals and lifeless objects. Using “holy water” he claims to make houses, cars and other everyday objects holy, but leaving the owner a lot poorer for the service.

In the sermons of the Orthodox Church, the Scriptures are seriously distorted. For example, the parable of the great supper is used to support the practice of feast days for saints, and there is a great number of them. Great celebration is required and full use is made of their icons. What is done in connection with the burial of the dead is also very disturbing, and there is a real question as to how much part a Christian should take in these ceremonies. Incense fills the place of worship and the dead are laid out so that poor relations will come and offer prayer and all sorts of gifts to them in hope of obtaining some heavenly favour.

The Church holds, with astonishing blindness, that some people were so close to God that they had the Holy Spirit in both their hearts and their bodies. This is why their bodies are preserved, and are used with a view to healing the sick. It is further claimed that the relics of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah and Zechariah and several of the apostles never decayed. By piously venerating the relics of the saints, the Church professes to reverence them as temples of the Holy Spirit in which God dwells even after death. Such superstition is made even worse by saying that God, in His wisdom and goodness, works miracles by these relics. And these miracles, so the Church claims, show that the attention people pay to these relics is pleasing to God.

(3.) **Government.** The order of offices in the Orthodox Church resembles what is found in the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches. The lower orders are obedient to the higher, and ultimate power rests with the Patriarch. Although, unlike the Pope, he does not claim to have jurisdiction over kings and governments, he acts much like the Pope in his dominion over the faith of believers. The Patriarch of Constantinople is honoured as the chief of all the Patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches. Church councils are used to settle disputes and make decisions on matters of doctrine. There are Orthodox Churches in 14 nations besides Russia, including Georgia, Serbia, Albania, Greece, Romania and Poland. Throughout the world there are over 200 million Orthodox believers, but many of them have only a nominal association with the faith; they are counted only because they were baptized.

Monasteries have a very significant place in the structure of the Orthodox Church. In them young men are prepared for the priesthood, and the poor go to them in the hope of receiving some physical or spiritual blessing. The higher the standing of the monk, the more effective his prayers and blessings are considered to be. Vast treasures of wealth are associated with the monasteries and this is reflected in the gorgeous temples of Orthodox countries. One such temple in Odessa, demolished by the Communists, is now being rebuilt. To finance this enormous centre of idolatry, every business in the city is obliged by law to pay a specific tax. This is an example of the real power of the Orthodox Churches.

We cannot ignore the fact that most, if not all, Orthodox believers are altogether ignorant of the truths of the gospel. The Church has a very powerful hold on the people, and superstition is actively promoted. The influence of the Orthodox Churches has, to a great extent, shaped the countries of Eastern Europe. It should impress on us once again how thankful we ought to be that we have, not only the Bible, but the pure gospel. How great is our responsibility to apply our hearts to the wisdom that is found in it.

## The Book of Ruth

### 74. “Naomi, that is Come Again”

*Rev Keith M Watkins*

Ruth 4:3. “And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech’s.”

**B**oaz wanted to marry Ruth. But there was a man more closely related to Ruth’s deceased husband than Boaz. In Israel, that man had to have the first opportunity to marry Ruth. Boaz began to tell him about some land which Ruth’s mother-in-law needed to sell. He said, “Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech’s”. Being the closest relative, it was also that man’s duty to buy the land, to keep it in the family.

“Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab.” Mention of Moab is a reminder of *Naomi’s mistake*. When the children of Israel were in trouble and food was short, Naomi and her husband Elimelech had gone to Moab, where they hoped life would be easier. They had sought the things of this world first, and put the things of God in second place. They had left the land of God’s worship and people, to go to a land of idolatry. Naomi knew that this had displeased the Lord (see 2:21).

It was an old mistake, committed many years before. But the passage of time did not make it disappear. It was a mistake that Naomi had repented of. She had “come again out of the country of Moab” and returned to Israel. But her repentance did not mean that it had never happened. It was a mistake that God had forgiven. Naomi would suffer no eternal vengeance as a result. But her pardon did not make people forget what she had done. No one in Bethlehem could forget it. Even Boaz, a great friend, could not forget it. And certainly, Naomi herself could not forget it. “The country of Moab” – what sorrow such words must have brought to her repentant heart!

A day is coming when a believer’s sins will not be found even if they are looked for (see Jeremiah 50:20). “None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him” (Ezekiel 33:16). But as long as he remains in this world, that day has not arrived, and he will have many reminders of his sin.

Beware! You reap what you sow. The sins you commit now in your youth will rise up as witnesses against you in the future. If you never find Christ, your sins will cause you to weep and wail in hell for ever. Even if you become a child of God, they will cause you tears of godly sorrow as long as you live in the world. In bitter remembrance of those sins, you will pray, “Remember not the sins of my youth” (Psalm 25:7).

“Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab.” Here is a testimony to *Naomi's grace*. Yes, Naomi had gone to Moab. That was her mistake. But she had returned. By the grace of God, she had “come again”. Things had changed. And let everyone know that things had changed. Just as her sin was recorded, so must her grace be recorded also. Naomi had turned her back on godless Moab, and was settled once more in the land where the true God – her own God – was known and worshipped.

Just as the failings of the Lord's people are often recorded in Scripture, so He loves to record His grace working in them. “The woman in the city, which was a sinner” (Luke 7:37) had done much that was wrong. She had been sinful – very sinful. That could not be denied. But “her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much” (Luke 7:47). A change had come. She washed the Saviour's feet with the tears of her repentance. Let it be known that she had obtained grace to love the Saviour greatly. She had “come again”.

When Jesus rose from the dead, “He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils” (Mark 16:9). Yes, Mary had been possessed with seven devils. That is not hidden. Who can tell what kind of sinner she must have been? But see what Jesus had done for her: the devils were gone and grace had come. She had “come again”.

Saul of Tarsus was “a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (1 Timothy 1:13). That was his sin. But grace turned him into the Apostle Paul, and believers started to say, “He which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed” (Galatians 1:23). He had “come again”.

The Lord delights to notice grace in His people, and so should we. It might be that we know much about their sins before they were converted. We cannot simply forget what we know. But let us be sure to notice the work of God's grace in them, and speak of that to His glory.

What will be said of you? That you had sins? Of course, that is true of everyone. But will it be said of you that you repented and “came again”? That can be said of only a few. Perhaps many others went to Moab when Naomi did. But only of Naomi is it said that she came again from Moab. We all have sin, but only some have grace. We all go astray from the Lord, but only a few are brought back to God. Like the prodigal son, we all go to the far country of sin, but only some “come again” and return to God.

“Naomi . . . selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's.” Here is *Naomi's affliction*. Naomi had turned from her sin. It was forgiven. But its consequences were still with her. In pursuit of worldly comforts she had left the land of Israel. She had despised the land which the Lord had



given to her family, in favour of the pagan country of Moab. She realised that now. But that did not mean her problems were over. Not yet. She had lost her husband. She had lost both her sons. And now she was about to lose her share of the promised land. The harvest was finished and Ruth could not glean any more, so Naomi was forced to sell the land to get money.

Even if we repent of our sins and obtain the Lord's forgiveness, we may still have to suffer in this world as a result of them. This was the case with David. He sinned when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. Later his sin was forgiven and he truly repented. But from that time he would have troubles in his family (see 2 Samuel 12:10,11). It began with his son Amnon and his daughter Tamar (see 2 Samuel 13). Then his son Absalom rebelled and even "went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" (2 Samuel 16:22). David had sinned in family matters, and so he was afflicted in his family until the day he died.

Sin has consequences! Even if you get the pardon of your sins, do not think that will mean escape from all affliction. It is not so. The thief who believed in Christ was forgiven all his sins, but the crime that put him on the cross still had its consequences. He still had to die a criminal's death. God's people may be afflicted on account of sin for a long time after that sin is forgiven. Naomi's troubles were not over yet. So beware of sin! Even if it is forgiven and you do not go to hell for it, yet it can bring afflictions that might remain with you until your dying day. Even faith in Christ and sorrow for sin will not prevent afflictions for sin.

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## Follow Peace and Holiness

For seven years, until her death in 1999, Mrs Margaret R Macleod contributed to this Magazine, each month, a letter to a young friend of hers. These letters have now been collected under the title *Dear J* and published as an attractive hardback (168 pages, £7.50, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom and other bookshops). The book contains a new biographical introduction by Rev Neil M Ross. Here is the letter she wrote for January 1993; readers can in their minds replace 1993, as it appears in the article, by 2005.

Dear J,

Here is a text for you to learn. It would make a good motto text for 1993, and indeed for your whole life. You will find it in Hebrews 12:14: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

You might well wonder how it is possible for anybody – especially someone as young as you – to follow peace with all men, and to follow holiness, in such an unholy world as we live in. How are you to follow peace

with people who take God's name in vain and who show very plainly that they have no love to God or to holiness? It is not easy for you to tell them that they are wrong, but you can at least show your disapproval and leave their company without doing it in a quarrelsome way. We must try to be kind and helpful to everybody, but we must not let them think that we in any way approve of their sin.

There was one Child who did this perfectly always. Yes, it was Jesus. He followed peace with all men, and yet He was never afraid to say that He was about His Father's business. He was a holy child. How He would have loved the Old Testament Scriptures! (The New Testament, of course, was not then written.) I am sure He would have been singing the Psalms, among them the Psalms which you are learning. But how well He would understand what He was singing! So many of these Psalms are about Himself, His sufferings and His glory, and He well knew what they meant.

To be holy is something that is very much despised today. People may laugh at you if they think that you are holy. But just remember that these people have only a little while to mock at those who are holy. In a few short years everyone who is in the world today, yourself included, will either be in heaven and perfectly holy, or in hell and all the time getting more and more unholy. What an awful thought that is!

To be holy is to be truly happy – even in this world, but far more so in heaven. Those who are unholy can have a kind of happiness, but only in this world. There are so many pleasures that can give us worldly happiness here; some are not sinful, but many are. In eternity these earthly pleasures will all have been left behind, and all unholy people will be terribly miserable, and getting more and more so for ever. Satan knows this very well and is doing all he can to make sinners forget it by trying to keep them happy in the sinful pleasures of this world.

I remember being told when I was young that above every cinema, theatre and dance hall it should be written in large letters: "WHOSOEVER DRINKETH OF THIS WATER SHALL THIRST AGAIN." What Jesus meant when He spoke these words was that no pleasure in this world can satisfy us for long. We must go to Him for real and lasting satisfaction.

It is not enough to keep away from these various places of sinful amusement. You must have holiness, for our motto text tells us that without holiness no man shall see the Lord – that is, no man shall be in heaven. You should ask God to write this in your memory.

Now, it is in this world that we must begin to be holy. Ask God to forgive your sin, and to give you a holy heart, so that you would hate sin. Ask Him to make you hate the sin of quarrelling, so that you would want to live at

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peace with everyone. It is God alone who can help you to follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. I do hope that you will begin to seek that help in 1993.

Wishing you God's blessing,  
Margaret R Macleod

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## Good Advice

Dr Virgilina is, I believe, someone who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ. By the grace of the Spirit she has come to see that she is a sinner in God's sight. She knows that only through faith in the Lord Jesus can she be at peace with the holy God.

She is a judge in Goiânia, a large town in central Brazil. She meets with many difficulties in her daily life, but she told me that, before entering court, she always prays to the Lord for guidance and strength. She sees herself as poor, needy and foolish and she pleads that it will please the Lord to give her wisdom and grant her His rich mercy as she deals with people in court. She is often presented with opportunities for witnessing on the Lord's side and in a humble and sincere way she speaks to those who are often in a desperate situation.

One of these was a farmer who had once been rich, but had now lost everything: his truck, his cattle, even his farm. In order to earn his living, he now had to pick tomatoes on someone else's farm. At the end of each day, he would be paid according to the number of boxes he had filled. But even if he worked all day, it would not amount to much money.

As he came to court to settle the matter of his debts, he complained to Dr Virgilina about his situation and tried to explain to her the sad position he was now in: how he was now only a humble tomato picker. She then said to him: "My dear sir, I can indeed see your plight. This is what I advise you to do every day: each time you pick a tomato and place it in the box, say to yourself: "Glory be to God who has left me with a livelihood. Think on this, and may the Lord show you the things that really matter in this life."

Well, that was good advice, was it not? How easily we can put great confidence in our possessions, when what matters far more is where we are going to spend eternity. Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus illustrates this point so clearly. The rich man "fared sumptuously" – he lived in dazzling splendour, someone has put it – while Lazarus begged at his gate. Later on, Lazarus, who was now in heaven, heard a request from the rich man, who was in hell. Do you remember what he wanted Lazarus to do? To get one

drop of water to cool his tongue from the torments of hell! What good were his riches to him now?

On another occasion, Dr Virgilina saw a cleaner, Berenice, weeping in the corridor. She went up to her and asked why she was weeping. Berenice told her that she had sold her little house (because she needed the money) and the buyer tricked her into giving him the deed to the house before he paid her. But now that he had the deed he would not give her the money. Dr Virgilina asked her to come to her office after work. She then told Berenice: "This is a very difficult situation. We are going to pray to the Lord and ask Him for help and guidance."

And so they did. In her prayer, Dr Virgilina asked the Lord to help Berenice in her plight. She finished her prayer by leaving everything in His wise hand, knowing in her heart that the Lord would help her.

After a couple of days Berenice came to see Dr Virgilina again. She looked calm and cheerful, and Dr Virgilina wondered what could have happened to make her so much happier. Berenice told her: "I've come here because I'd like you to tell me about your God and how I can learn to pray to Him". They agreed to meet again after work, and then every day, so that Berenice could come and learn about the Lord Jesus. The next thing she did was to look for a church that would teach her about the Word of God.

Berenice had discovered that she was a sinner in God's sight and that, unless she was reconciled to Him, she would perish in hell throughout eternity. She also learned that God has sent His only Son to die for sinners. It seems that Berenice was truly seeking the Lord, and that she now understood that only through Jesus can God's wrath against sinners be turned away.

But how had Berenice lived before then? Well, she had been a so-called "giver of blessings". This is a sinful, superstitious practice among Roman Catholics in South America. If someone feels he has been going through difficulties in his life, he seeks out a person who "gives blessings". This person says a few strange prayers – usually holding some small green branches and making the sign of a cross – and then all the difficulties in that person's life are supposed to disappear. What ignorance this practice shows! Are we not told in the Word of God that we should commit our ways to the Lord, and flee from all superstition and false religion?

Apparently, a lot of people used to go to Berenice for these "blessings". But when she started seeking the Lord, she would give this reply to such people: "I am no giver of blessings. If you really want to be blessed, you should seek the Lord Jesus. Only He is able to bless us."

So this is how this young judge goes on in her daily life. She meets many poor, needy people and the Lord enables her to speak to them of the

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things that really matter in life. She tells them how they may find Him.

May it please the Lord to place more godly people in high places, to show an example to others how they ought to live their lives. In such wicked days as these, it is common to see people in high places defying the Word of God, who thus set a bad example to the people they rule over. Our prayer should constantly be: "Thy kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10), and, "Arise, Lord, let not man prevail" (Psalm 9:19).

*C Johnson*

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*For Junior Readers*

## A New Beginning

A new year has started. A new beginning. What does it mean for you? Does it make you want to do things better this year? For example: to try harder with your school work, to be more obedient at home, to listen more carefully in church, to be more diligent about praying by yourself and reading your Bible?

All these are just what you should do. And you should ask God to help you with them. I am sure, as you look ahead, the year stretches out before you like a very long time. But you can be certain that it will pass very quickly. Think of the time you are given this year, God sparing you, as an allowance. But how will you spend it?

"Man's chief end [or chief purpose] is to glorify God." So should you not pray to spend the time God has given you this year to His glory? Should you not want to put Him first in everything.

A godly minister of long ago, called William Jay, wrote some very loving letters to his youngest daughter. He advised her how to make good use of her young years: "O, my dear," he told her, "what a season is youth!" If she would think of the whole of life as a day, he said, youth is the morning. So how desirable it is in every way to set apart the present time as a preparation for the future. Before we go any farther on the journey of life, we ought to take someone as a guide, a guard, a friend, who will never leave us or forsake us. Who can that be? Jay went on to explain: "I trust that you are placing yourself under Christ's direction and saying, 'I will go in the strength of the Lord'."

J G Pike, another godly man, wrote a book specially for young people, called *Persuasives to Early Piety*. In it he pleads with children to seek the Lord now. He wrote something like this: "O, be persuaded now to yield yourself to God. Then next New Year's Day shall find you walking in the way to heaven, or already there. In either case, how blessed a change the grace

of God will have made in your condition! Though you began the year in sin, how good to have found forgiveness for all your sins long before it ended! Though you began it a child of wrath, how good to be a child of God before it ended. May the God of all grace make you, from this hour, His own child, in and through Christ the Lord!"

*J van Kralingen*

*Note:* Pike's book is again in print and is available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

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*For Younger Readers*

## **“I Have Enough”**

**M**r Ball was a minister. He was always saying, “I have enough, enough, enough”.

He must have been a very contented man. He was not for ever saying, “I want more; I want more”. Do you know why he was so satisfied with what he had?

I think it was because he knew God gave him everything he had. It is God that gives us all our good things. He knows what we need.

Do you think Mr Ball would go about complaining when he wanted something but did not get it? Perhaps sometime he thought he needed a new horse but did not have the money to buy one.

(It was long ago, when there were no cars or buses or trains. If Mr Ball was to get around to preach in different places, he needed a horse to carry him. Or else he would just have to walk all the way.)

Mr Ball would say something like this to himself: “God could give me a new horse if He thought it would be good for me. But He has not given me one. So He knows I do not need it yet.”

But the time would come when Mr Ball would need a new horse. His old horse might become sick, or just grow too old. How would he get around to preach then? What could he do?

He could go and tell God everything about his horse. He would go to pray. He would ask God to give him a new horse – if that would be good for him.

What about you? Are you content with what God gives you? Or are you always complaining? Are you always wanting new things, whether they are good for you or not?

We should always ask God to give us what we need. And we should be content if He does not give us what we want. We should be ready to say, like Mr Ball: “I have enough, enough, enough”.

## Looking Around Us

### “Living Each Day to the Full”

Pupils in an English school were told that an asteroid was on a collision course with the Earth and they would all be killed. Some of them were so upset that they burst into tears. It seems almost unbelievable, but the 14-year-old pupils were told that they should go home and say “final farewells” to their families. No wonder they were so distressed!

The idea behind this announcement, at a school assembly, was to teach the pupils “the importance of seizing the day” and of “living each day to the full”. It was a very worthwhile aim. But what standards were set? Did the teacher take out his Bible and read the verse: “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16)? Did he explain that the pupils could not begin to live their days to the full unless they had God’s glory as their chief aim? And did he tell them the importance of seeking “the Lord while He may be found”?

Probably not. Which is a great pity. We should treat every day as a gift from God, which should be used to His glory, as well as for our good. There is no need to make up stupid stories like this to get across such basic lessons about life. God has given us the Bible, which in a great variety of ways shows us how to get the most out of the short time we will spend in this world. The most important aspect of living our life here to the full is to prepare for eternity, which will never come to an end.

### Today’s Gods

Early one morning in December, fire broke out in a building in Glasgow containing two nightclubs, the Trash and the Shack. Both were completely destroyed in the huge blaze. Twelve fire appliances were brought to the scene to fight the flames, which leapt high into the air.

When the Free Presbyterian church in Glasgow was on West George Street, many in the congregation regularly passed this building, which itself was once a church. For many years, this building with massive pillars holding up the front of the structure, lay empty. That itself was testimony to declining church attendance, as the people of Glasgow, in common with people throughout Scotland and beyond, paid less and less attention to God and His worship. Whatever may have been the quality of the doctrine preached in this building when it was used as a church, at least the Word of God was read. At least in an outward way, God was acknowledged.

Sadly, the building for the last four years was turned over to the worship of other gods: the world, the flesh and the devil. God is not in the thoughts

of most people in this generation. Instead they give themselves to what they believe will give them enjoyment – willfully forgetting God and the enjoyment that He can give, both in this world and in the next. At the same time, they are doing the will of Satan, who wishes to destroy them for ever.

### **The Mistaken Philanthropist**

Zell Kravinsky, says a newspaper article, “is the world’s most philanthropic man”. A philanthropist is someone who loves mankind and actively seeks to do good to other people. Kravinsky’s way of doing good to others has been to give many millions of dollars to charity. He has even given up one of his kidneys to save a 30-year old stranger in need of a transplant. His gift of his kidney has been described as “an act of altruism” – an act done quite unselfishly, out of concern for others.

But, although he has helped so many people in some very remarkable ways, he has really been seeking something for *himself*. “He is on a quest to live a moral life,” the article explains. “I used to feel,” he said, “that I had to *be* truly good in my heart and spirit, in order to *do* good. But it’s the other way round – if you *do* good, you *become* better.”

When Mr Kravinsky feels good after doing good to others, the goodness he feels is obviously a sense of self-satisfaction. But he is not yet fully satisfied; he has admitted: “I’m depressed because I haven’t done enough.” So he goes on, *doing* good in order to *be* good.

There are many who think like him – that the way to *be* good is to *do* good. What does the Bible say? Real goodness is the kind of goodness which only God can put within us. Only by having this goodness will we be good and do good – although we will do good very imperfectly at the best, as every true Christian knows. Kravinsky was basically correct in originally thinking that he had to *be* truly good in his heart and spirit, in order to *do* good, but he was altogether wrong in thinking that *he* could make himself good in heart and spirit.

The teaching of the Bible is very definite – that *we ourselves* can never make our hearts good in God’s sight. God Himself must do the “good work” of renewing our hearts. Only then will we have what one young boy had long ago: “some *good* thing toward the Lord God of Israel” (1 Kings 14:13). That boy, Abijam, was the good son of wicked King Jeroboam. But he had a good heart because God made it so.

Ask God that He, in His mercy and for Christ’s sake, would put within you “a clean heart” and “a right spirit”. When this will happen, you will begin – but only begin – to *be* good and *do* good in a biblical way. Any other goodness is not good enough.

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## Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2004-05

### Names for Exercise 1

**Senior Section:** *Dingwall:* Joanna Mackenzie, Neil MacLean. *Farr:* Ruth MacQueen. *Fort William:* William S Mackinnon. *Glasgow:* Marion MacLeod. *Inverness:* Chloe W E Fiddes. *London:* Rebecca Munns, Naomi Rowland, Josie van Kralingen. *North Uist:* Rhoda Cameron, John Macdonald, Kathleen Macdonald. *Portree:* Finlay MacRaild. *Rotherfield:* Edward Hanks. *Stornoway:* Stephen M Macdonald, Angus D Macleod. *Swordale:* Sara E P Macleod.

**Intermediate Section:** *Blunsdon Hill:* Emily Sayers. *Bonar Bridge:* Rebecca and Sandy Campbell. *Dingwall:* Beverly and Kathryn Mackenzie, Sarah MacLean. *Dunoon:* Esther Maley. *Farr:* Caitlin R MacQueen. *Fort William:* Sarah Smith. *Glasgow:* Neil Freeke, Kenneth C Gillies, Donald MacLeod. *Guildford:* Matthew Risbridger. *Inverness:* Mark Campbell, Lois H Fiddes, James Fraser, Jonathan Schouten. *Kyle:* Paul Whear. *London:* Elizabeth Munns, David Rowland, Alexander Turnbull. *North Uist:* Flora M Macdonald, Kerri Macinnes. *Scaynes Hill:* Abigail and Martha Main. *South Harris:* Stewart MacLean. *Stornoway:* Anne Dickie, Karina Ferguson. *Stratherrick:* David Fraser. *Swordale:* Murdo S Macleod. *Tomatin:* Lois Cameron-Mackintosh. *Ullapool:* Siobhan MacCulloch, Susannah C Mackenzie.

**Junior Section:** *Aberdeen:* Rebecca A V Buchanan. *Barnoldswick:* Philip J Martin. *Bonar Bridge:* Elizabeth Campbell. *Crowborough:* Heidi Woodhams. *Dingwall:* Alistair Mackenzie. *Edinburgh:* Eilidh Logan, Jonathan MacDonald. *Farr:* Alasdair MacQueen. *Fort William:* Rachel M Mackinnon, Joshua Smith. *Glasgow:* Laura Chisholm, Catherine Freeke, Hugh Gillies, Neil Gillies. *Inverness:* Andrew Campbell, Natalie Macaskill, Catherine Schouten. *Kyle:* Daniel Whear. *London:* Richard Hawke, William Munns, Alice Smales, Constance and Rupert J Turnbull. *North Harris:* Donald R Macleod. *North Tolsta:* Mark Mackenzie, Sean MacLeod. *North Uist:* John Cameron, Alastair and Christina Macdonald, Laura Macinnes. *Scaynes Hill:* Philip Main. *Shieldaig:* Jennifer Goldby. *Stornoway:* Alasdair Gillies. *Stratherrick:* John Fraser. *Vatten:* Rebecca Fleming.

**Upper Primary Section:** *Barnoldswick:* Robert Ross. *Belfast:* Alison and Renwick Sharp. *Cranbrook:* Alasdair Bailey. *Dingwall:* Alasdair MacLean, Andrew MacLeod, Ruth Macleod. *Edinburgh:* Catriona Logan, Isla Macdonald. *Farr:* Finlay Cramp. *Gairloch:* Rachel Mackenzie, Mairi Wyatt. *Glasgow:* Ewen and Fiona Beaton, Donna Chisholm, Ian Gillies, Iona Gillies, Kate Gillies, Rachel and Ruairidh Macleod, Peter Macpherson. *Haywards Heath:* Hannah Woodhams. *Inverness:* Anna Fraser, Thomas Maton, Peter Schouten. *London:* Edward Munns, Rachele Strata, Lucy Turnbull, Amy van Kralingen. *Ness:* Deborah Acton. *North Harris:* Tormoid Mackinnon. *North Tolsta:* Sheena Mackenzie, Lucy MacLeod. *North Uist:* Margaret Cameron, Fraser MacDonald, John A Macdonald. *Salisbury:* Jill Buchanan. *South Harris:* Catherine Macleod. *Stornoway:* Sarah Gillies, Lauren Macdonald, Andrew MacQuarrie. *Stratherrick:* Ewen Fraser. *Trowbridge:* Joanna Broome. *Uig:* Murdo George Mackay. *Vatten:* Sabrina Annand.

**Lower Primary Section:** *Barnoldswick:* David Martin, Emma Norris, James and Rebecca Ross. *Croydon:* Andrew, Marcus and Susanna Hickman. *Dingwall:* Laura and Sheena MacLean, Graham MacLeod. *Edinburgh:* Annabelle and Daniel Macdonald. *Farr:* Muriel Cramp. *Fort William:* Anna and Gerrit Smith. *Gairloch:* Donald Mackenzie, Catherine Wyatt. *Glasgow:* Grant Beaton, Cameron Gillies, Callum and Kenneth Macpherson, Rachel Smith. *Haywards Heath:* Edwin and Kate Woodhams. *Inverness:* Jonathan Fiddes, Nikki MacLennan, John and Rebekah Maton. *Kyle:* Nathan Whear. *Larne:* Cameron Sharp. *London:* Sarah Hawke, Claudia, Edward and Oliver Martin, Andrew and Samuel Munns, Angus Pontin, David and Elizabeth Strata, Annabelle, Henry, Jemima, Jeremy and Joseph Turnbull. *North Tolsta:* Isla Macdonald, Innes Mackenzie, Scott Macleod. *North Uist:* Iain Boyd, Eilidh Cameron, Angus Macinnes. *Raasay:* Joseph MacGowan. *Staffin:* Neil Angus Matheson. *Stornoway:* Leah Beaton, Cirsty Gillies, Aimee Macleod, Eilidh Macleod, Ryan MacSween, Finlay and Uilleam Murray. *Ullapool:* Lewis Mackenzie. *Vatten:* Jayne-Anne Fleming, John Fleming.

## The Vanity of the World

God gives His mercies to be spent;  
Your hoard will do your soul no good;  
Gold is a blessing only lent,  
Repaid by giving others food.

The world's esteem is but a bribe,  
To buy their peace you sell your own;  
The slave of a vain-glorious tribe,  
Who hate you while they make you known.

The joy that vain amusements give,  
O, sad conclusion that it brings!  
The honey of a crowded hive,  
Defended by a thousand stings.

'Tis thus the world rewards the fools  
That live upon her treacherous smiles;  
She leads them blindfold by her rules,  
And ruins all whom she beguiles.

God knows the thousands who go down  
From pleasure into endless woe;  
And with a long despairing groan  
Blaspheme their Maker as they go.

O fearful thought! Be timely wise;  
Delight but in a Saviour's charms,  
And God shall take you to the skies,  
Embraced in everlasting arms.

*John Newton*

### **2005 Youth Conference**

This year's conference will be held, God willing, in St Andrews from Tuesday, March 29, to Thursday, March 31. Further details are to appear in next month's magazine.