

SHE BRIGHTENED HER LITTLE CORNER

By Hershel Dyer

The city of Joppa, now a section of Tel Aviv and called Jaffa, has been a seaport from ancient times. The prophet Jonah took passage on a boat from Joppa to go to Tarshish. It was here that the great Israelite liberator, Judas Maccabeus, set fire to a fleet of enemy ships in the 2nd century, B.C., avenging the deaths of some 200 Jews. As a port of incoming and outgoing merchandise, one can readily imagine the morally debauched persons who were attracted to it.

In this city, during the early days of the church, there lived a woman by the name of Dorcas. She was a disciple of Christ and is described as a woman “full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.” (Acts 9:36.) Since clothing was made by hand in those days, she must have

spent much time and labor in making garments for the poor.

Outside the circle of the church in Joppa and the widows with their children whom she clothed, the world might never have known about Dorcas. Her notoriety came after she had become sick and had died. Some of the brethren rushed away to the nearby city of Lydda and brought the apostle Peter back to Joppa. Her subsequent resurrection became widely known so that “many believed on the Lord.” (Acts 9:42.)

Here was a woman who sought no fame or glory for herself. She just went about, day by day, rendering needed services for those who could not help themselves.

No doubt the tears of joy in the eyes of poor widows, the sweet

smiles on the faces of their innocent children, were all the reward in this world that she desired. If there had been newspapers, we doubt that the deeds of Dorcas would have been noticed.

This godly woman just brightened the little corner where she was and God did not forget what she did.

“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” (Hebrews 6:10.)

— Tulsa, OK

STANDING BOLDLY FOR THE LORD

By Milton Smith

One of the qualities that the apostle Paul seemed to possess in great measure was a display of boldness. So impressive was Paul’s courage that Luke often felt compelled to write about it in the book of Acts. For example, when Sergius Paulus was listening with great interest to Paul’s preaching, a sorcerer named Elymas was intensely contradicting what the great apostle to the Gentiles was saying. Luke tells us that Paul “looked intently at him,” and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?” No doubt, when Paul “looked intently at him,” he was showing great boldness in the face of opposition from this evil practitioner of the dark arts. (Acts 13:6-12.)

While Paul was standing before

the Sanhedrin accused of things worthy of death, an angry mob had just shouted “away with him.” (Acts 21:36.) But we are told that Paul “looking steadfastly at the council” and said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” (Acts 23:1.) That response took boldness. This was not the language of a man who was guilty of wrong doing. Without a doubt, Paul showed the calm expression of an innocent man on this occasion. How cruel the action of the chief priest was when he told those standing nearby to “strike him on the mouth!” I have sometimes wondered what it would have been like to have seen Paul’s facial expressions through all of this. My guess is that there was probably something in his face and eyes that was well calculated to impress even his accusers.

Paul often demonstrated particular characteristics that would suggest that while he possessed self-reliance and calmness, he also showed an overpowering demonstration of boldness. For the Christian, boldness comes as a result of having confidence in what we believe and a full trust in Jesus Christ. Paul once made this request of the members of the church at Thessalonica: “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.” (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2.) May we all have that same quality of boldness that this great apostle often demonstrated throughout his life.

— Tulsa, OK

Old Paths

Vol. 40, No. 8 August, 2016

“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

FAITH, OBEDIENCE, AND THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

By Joe Slater

Every ten years we take a census in the United States. Accurate numbers are important to governments, businesses, and other entities. But why would census numbers be recorded in the Bible? The book of Numbers derives its name from the two times Israel’s men of war (20 years old and up) were counted tribe by tribe. Just after they came out of Egypt, Moses took the first census. As the forty-year period of wandering was coming to an end, another count was made. Maybe you have skipped over this seemingly tedious information while reading Numbers. But you don’t have to be a math whiz to appreciate the significance of these two tallies.

Comparing the total at the exodus to the count after forty years of wandering, we find very little difference. Israel’s army started out with 603,500 (Numbers 1:46) and decreased by less than 2000 men (601,730 in Numbers 26:51). For all practical purposes, the army was the same size. This demonstrates that Israel’s failure to take the promised land of Canaan shortly after leaving Mt. Sinai was not because the army was too small - a slightly smaller army went in under Joshua’s leadership, and God gave them victory. Their failure (resulting in the extended wandering in the desert) was not due to a lack of manpower, but to a lack of faith in God’s power. Likewise today, faithlessness cripples the church far more than small numbers. (Oftentimes, small faith results in small numbers willing to work.)

Looking at the fluctuation in numbers among the various tribes is also enlightening. Like the nation as a whole, some of the tribes maintained a relatively stable population. Others, however, experienced sharp increases or steep declines. Manasseh’s change was the most radical, increasing by over 63%. Simeon’s population of fighting men, however, decreased during the same period by over 62%. Some other tribes also grew or declined by significant amounts. Why? Remember the numerous instances of rebellion; in some cases, thousands of people were put to death. Evidently the rebels were concentrated in certain tribes. How severe is the penalty for sin! Yet even this pales in comparison to the eternal destruction awaiting those who remain outside of God’s grace.

The Bible might seem to be a strange place to find population statistics, but they are more significant than some folks think! Timeless biblical principles such as faith and obedience are taught even there.

— Justin, TX

LONGING FOR HOME

By Glen Walton

“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you.’” (Exodus 13:19.)

Joseph had enjoyed a distinguished career in Egypt. Next to Pharaoh, he had held the highest position in that country. Yet those long years of faithful service never made him feel he really belonged to Egypt. Before he died, he adjured his people to take his mortal remains to the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Lord expects His people to be faithful in their earthly positions and responsibilities. By so doing they honor Christ and His church. Yet they are to never become so attached to this world that they prefer it to the land of promise.

Our home is not here, but in heaven. Here we are pilgrims and sojourners on our way to a better place. (1 Peter 2:11.)

Peter thus wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:3,4.)

— Amarillo, TX

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’” (Revelation 21:1-4.)

“I’LL GO AS FAR AS I CAN”

By Bobby Key

The preacher of the gospel should not be overcome with material things. He must not lose sight of spiritual values. It is unwise to turn aside after things that perish while neglecting the great things that will outlive him.

One is a hireling who preaches simply for what he can get out of it from a financial standpoint. I am afraid for the preacher who is forever seeking better and more comfortable quarters, bigger and better churches, and bigger and better salaries. It is true that the laborer is worthy of his hire, but the servant of the crucified Master ought not to be a seeker after luxury.

Preachers of today have it so much better than those of yesterday. Over a century ago, brother James A. Harding said to a young man, a student in the old Potter Bible School, Bowling Green, Kentucky, “Frank, I want you to hitch up the carriage and drive me to the depot. I must leave for a Meeting.” When this young man stopped in front of the Harding home a little later, Mrs. Harding was inquiring how her husband expected to buy a ticket without money. That good servant was heard to reply, “I’ll go as far as I can.” The trip into Bowling Green was made without further word of ticket or money.

Soon after entering the little city, a man waved for the carriage to stop, explaining that for some time he had desired to have fellowship with Harding in spreading the gospel of Christ, and handed him a twenty dollar bill. At the depot he purchased his ticket, turned to Frank, and placing every bit of the change in his hand, instructed that it be given to his wife.

Harding then boarded the train and continued his journey to some favored place to tell of Him who said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33.)

— Miami, OK

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6.)

Editorial . . .

DISTURBING WORDS

By Dalton Key

Something has gone terribly, undeniably wrong. When those in lofty positions of authority speak lies, deceptions, and pseudo-clever half-truths, rejecting the clear path of truth for carefully parsed, semantic mazes, something is just not right.

And it disturbs me.

Doesn’t it bother you to hear untruths presented, promoted, and then defended as true? Doesn’t it fuel your fires of righteous indignation to stand by and witness this constant, relentless campaign of calculated subterfuge? It seems every day, day after day, truth is being forced to take a backseat to falsehood.

Don’t misunderstand. For the moment, I’m not talking politics. I’m speaking of religion.

Something is wrong when preachers . . .

. . . in the face of clear passages such as Mark 16:16 insist that baptism has nothing to do with one’s salvation from sin.

. . . despite Paul’s unmistakable language in Ephesians 4:4, promise that one church is just as good as another.

. . . in shameful disregard for the words of Jesus in John 8:32, teach that spiritual and moral truth is altogether subjective, and thus varies from person to person and from situation to situation.

Yes, when supposed proclaimers of truth seem to do anything and everything but actually proclaim truth, something has gone wrong.

Jeremiah’s words of long ago, “From the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely,” could just as well have been written concerning similar shenanigans of our day. (Jeremiah 6:13.)

Perhaps now we know why Jeremiah has long been known as “the weeping prophet.”

“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Timothy 4:1-4.)



ENDEAVORING TO BE GUILILESS

By Danny Tunnell

The dictionary defines “guile” as: a deceitful cunning; duplicity, or a strategy to trick.

Are you striving to be guileless? God loves a guileless person, even if he is ignorant in some ways. God can cure ignorance, but for insincerity there is no cure.

Jesus said of Nathaniel, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47.) Peter tells us to follow Jesus’ example: “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.” (1 Peter 2:21-22.) If we are to love life, and see good days, we need to refrain our tongues from evil, and see to it that our lips speak no guile. (1 Peter 3:10.) Guile cannot be found in the mouths of redeemed in heaven. (Revelation 14:4-5.)

In the past few years numerous books have been published on human relationships, selling millions

of copies. Often these books teach techniques on the skillful use of flattery so a person can get what he or she desires. And yet, the use of flattery is spoken against many times in the Bible. (Psalm 12:2,3; Proverbs 7:21; 20:19; 26:28.)

In many of these human relationship books “courtesy” is taught. But it is not the biblical idea of being gracious and kind. Instead it is a false and phony “courtesy.”

It seems that the only time some people expose their real self is when they get mad.

Jesus always condemned phyness. He repudiated the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. (Matthew 23:14.) He set up a little child as our model for behavior: no pretense and total honesty before God and man. (Matthew 18:3-4.)

Endeavoring to become guileless is a worthy pursuit.

— Miami, OK

“Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another. ‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil . . . Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers . . . Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:25-27; 29, 30,31.)

MEN OF TRUTH

By Ron Stough

Words have always held a special interest to me. Expressing things clearly and concisely so that there is no doubt what is being communicated is important. As God’s people, we want our words to convey truth and honesty so that others know exactly what we are saying.

In our society, however, such a view is pretty rare. The philosophy today is to use words that’ll neither say too much nor too little. Choose words the may be construed one way or another way. Veil the truth behind abstract words, and let the listener hear what he wants to hear.

The absurdity of the situation was obvious a few years ago when our own President vehemently denied an allegation in one statement, and then admitted the allegation in another statement. His press secretary sought to ease our minds by explaining that

the President felt both statements were true.

The world shakes its head and asks like Pilate of old, “What is truth?” (John 18:38.)

The fact is that we can know truth when we know the source of truth. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” (John 14:6.) God is described as one who does not lie. (Titus 1:2.)

Satan, on the other hand, is the father of lies. (John 8:44.)

We can be assured that God’s Word is truth, and when we base our lies on that, we will be men of truth.

— Duncan, OK

“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.” (Proverbs

12:22.) “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.” (Ephesians 4:25.) “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” (Matthew 5:37.)

Old Paths

829 S. Rockford Ave.,
Tulsa, OK. 74120

On a nonprofit basis.
Published monthly and supported
by Churches of Christ
and individuals.

Dalton Key Editor

“Subscription Free;

Prayers Requested;

Contributions Appreciated.”