



The G.E.M.

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REMEMBER GOD'S GRACE

The unpredictable summer weather has arrived. One minute it is raining and storming, and you are having to pull out your winter woolies, the next, brilliant sunshine. Some days you feel on top of the world, others you just do not know why you are feeling under the weather.

However, there is one thing in life that is not unpredictable, and that is God. Though at times we may not understand what He does or does not do in our lives, we can rest assured that no matter what, He has the best results and intentions in mind.

Therefore this month we focus on the grace of God. We see how He has extended His gracious hand towards us as we look at an amazing text from the book of Ezekiel (page 3).

Bible Basics on page 2 gives you some basic insight into the book of Ezekiel in terms of its history and relevance for today. There are also two new features entitled: Heroes of the Faith and Bible Study 101, which over the coming months will give you some basic steps on how to effectively study the Bible. You will notice that the back page has changed a little. Instead of the Sudoku we have changed it to a crossword puzzle. One that will test you as you dig a little deeper into the book of Ezekiel.

Finally, at Grace Media, we are always available to help, so do not hesitate to contact us for any further information on products and services that we have to offer.

Until next time,
Glyn and Linda. †

"Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord"
(2 Peter 1:2)

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Ezekiel

The Book of Words for the Exiles

The book of Ezekiel is the first book of prophecy written during the time of the exile of Israel in Babylon. Its key theme is clearly the glory of God, as this term appears twelve times throughout the book.

Style: Ezekiel's message is presented in a unique style. Throughout the book we see his use of symbols (chapter 4), visions (chapter 8), parables (chapter 17), poems (chapter 19), proverbs (12:22-23; 18:2) and prophecies (chapters 6, 20, 40-48).

Date and authorship: The author of the book of Ezekiel is clearly identified in the text as Ezekiel himself. Throughout the book he speaks of himself in the first person.

From the events and people referred to in the book, the book is estimated to have been written between 593 BC and 571 BC (cf. Ezekiel 1:1-2 and 29:17).

Theology: There are five dominant theological themes running through the book of Ezekiel: God is Transcendent (not bound to a building), Israel is sinful, Judgement is certain, Individuals are responsible, and Restoration is coming.

Structure: Ezekiel's prophecies, like those of Isaiah, begins with initial messages of judgement, followed by words of comfort and hope.

The book can be divided into four main sections, where the messages within each section are in chronological order.

Chapters

Prophecy against Judah	1-24
Prophecy against foreign nations	25-32
Prophecies of restoration	33-39
Prophecy of the Rebuilt Temple	40-48

Ezekiel the Man: Ezekiel was taken into captivity to Babylon with the second group of exiles in 587 BC. While there he ministered to his fellow exiles and affirmed Jeremiah's message of judgement until Jerusalem's demise in 586 BC.

In Ezekiel 1:1-2, Ezekiel is identified as a member of one of Judah's aristocratic priestly families and is called to be a prophet to the nation in exile.

Did you Know? Even though there are very few references to Ezekiel in the Gospels and epistles, there are many striking similarities with the prophecies of the last days as recorded in the book of Revelation.

Value for Today: From the words of the prophet Ezekiel we are given a vision of the glory of God and given a sense of His presence in our lives as we struggle with the daily challenges that we face.

There is also the important warning that each person is individually responsible for their own choices and their relationship with God. †

John Wycliffe

John Wycliffe (1330?-1384) was a biblical reformer, bringing to bear the teachings of Scripture on the practices of the Roman church. He also engaged in Bible translation, and it was largely through his influence that the first English version was produced. Though he personally translated or supervised translation of parts of the Bible, his version was not completed until after his death, by Nicholas of Hereford and John Purvey. Without doubt, its widespread use had an influence on the development of the English language. Wycliffe was educated at Oxford and later became master of Balliol College there. For a while chaplain to the king, with access to Parliament, he was able to reach some of the upper-class English. But he also sought to reach the common people, sending out lay evangelists to instruct them.

After 1375 Wycliffe's reforming views developed rapidly. Pope Gregory XI condemned him in 1377 for his efforts, but he was protected by some of the nobles and the powerful John of Gaunt, who was duke of Lancaster and son of Edward III. These were the days of the Hundred Years War (between England and France), and it was unthinkable that Englishmen would surrender one of their most outstanding countrymen to a pope at Avignon, who was considered to be under the domination of England's French foes. The power of Wycliffe was at least threefold: his intense patriotism, his deep piety, and the belief of many that he had no scholarly equal in England.

To Wycliffe, Scripture, which he interpreted literally, was the sole authority for the believer. Decrees of the pope were not infallible except as based on Scripture. The clergy were not to rule, but to serve and help people. Eventually he reached the conclusion that Christ and not the pope was the head of the church; in fact, the pope, if he were too eager for worldly power, might even be regarded as the Antichrist. Ultimately he came to repudiate the entire papal system. He also attacked transubstantiation (the view that the bread and wine in the Eucharist become the body and blood of Christ) and seems to have come to a position similar to Luther's. Moreover, he condemned the dogma of purgatory and the use of relics, pilgrimages, and indulgences. He seems to have been deeply influenced by St. Augustine. It is not clear how evangelical Wycliffe was personally, but under the influence of biblical teaching, his followers increasingly moved in that direction.

The followers of Wycliffe were suppressed by force in 1401. Thereafter those who held his views went underground and no doubt helped to prepare the way for the Lutheran and Calvinistic teachings that invaded Britain about a century later. Bohemians studying at Oxford in Wycliffe's day carried his ideas to their homeland, where they influenced the teachings of John Hus.

Quoted from: Vos, HF. *Exploring Church History*. Thomas Nelson Publishers (1996). †

Why Study the Bible

Most Christians have gone through the stage of wanting to know the Bible well enough to be able to quote passages or explain Biblical concepts at the time that they are needed. Some even believe that it is not possible for them to do that because they cannot even remember what they had for lunch yesterday, never mind some obscure passage from Lamentations.

All too often we think studying the Bible involves the memorisation of hundreds of Bible verses that we can quote at the drop of a hat, but this is not the case. Instead we rather need to absorb the content and context of Scripture rather.

We therefore take tools that are provided for us, but often them for granted. Things like study Bibles, commentaries, dictionaries, computer software, and even Sunday sermons, seem to have replaced proper Bible study. We have allowed our often too busy lives to dictate how we study the Bible and have neglected what is one of the most truly rewarding aspects of our faith.

So, what is needed is for us to "dig in" to the text ourselves and not rely solely on the work that others have already done. For instance, we need to investigate for ourselves why John's Gospel is different from the other three and what the book of Ecclesiastes is really all about. Man makes errors, and to rely on what other men have said without investigating things for ourselves could have disastrous results. We need to be like the Bereans in Acts 17 who "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (v11).

It is for this very reason that men like Martin Luther and John Wycliffe began the work of translating the Bible into the language of the people. Having studied and understood for themselves, they felt the conviction that the people needed to do the same.

To study the Bible for ourselves will result in its truths being deeply rooted in our hearts and minds, and spiritual growth that will surpass all other actions.

Over the coming months we will look at some basic steps of Bible study. Steps that do not require a college degree but that anyone with a true desire to know God's Word can do. †

SHEKEL CARD HOLDERS

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Thank you to all customers who have supported our Shekel Card Loyalty programme this year. On 2 November we sent out the 2010 Shekel Card Vouchers to your e-mail addresses. Should you not have received yours, please send us a message and advise of any changes so we can amend our records and send you your Vouchers.

Remember that all vouchers are valid till 31 August 2011 and need to be presented with your Shekel Card at the time of use.

THE GLORY OF GOD'S GRACE

In Ezekiel 16, God is wooing the city of Jerusalem back to Himself after their chasing after idols. He reminds them of His great love for them, and of all the things He has done for, in and through them. He reminds them that they were nothing when He found them. However, He took them, blessed them and made them a great city. This can all be summed up in one word: Grace!

In these verses, we are reminded not only of what God did for Jerusalem, but also of what He has done for us as believers. Follow along in your Bibles as we look together at the Glory of God's Grace.

WRETCHED CONDITION (vv4-5)

The description of a helpless infant is a vivid and perfect picture of how each of us were before we were saved. This can be summed up in five words.

Filthy (v4): Sin can be defined as doing things "My Way" as opposed to God's Way, and can simply be called self-righteousness. From Isaiah 64:6 we know that our own righteous acts are like filthy rags to God (64:6). We needed to be spiritually cleansed.

Neglected (vv4b-5): Though physically we were probably cared for, spiritually we were neglected. That is why David declared "no one cares for my life" (Psalm 142:4).

Naked (v4c): Nothing in our lives could ever have covered up our sin before God. God sees our hearts and sees who we really are. Before being saved, we stood full of shame before Him in our sins (cf. Psalm 139:7-12; Hebrews 4:13).

Abandoned (v5b): Like the abandoned child, we were orphaned and all alone in this world without God (cf. Ephesians 2:12). Though physically surrounded by family and friends, none of them could ever satisfy the true need of our soul – reconciliation with God.

Helpless (vv4-5): A newborn baby is totally unable to change its condition. When we were lost, we too were unable to change things. It was impossible for us to save ourselves.

As non-believers, we were exactly like the abandoned baby in Ezekiel's image. If the story ended here, there would be absolutely no hope. But thankfully, there is more.

WONDERFUL COMPASSION (vv6-9)

In the image in Ezekiel, God is seen as the one who passes by, sees the child, and picks it up to rescue it from certain death. In the same way, the Lord has rescued all those who place their faith in Him. This can be seen in the following actions:

Initiated (v6a): Because of our inability to come to God or to sort ourselves out, God made the first move. No-one ever makes the first move towards God. It is the Father who draws people to Himself (cf. John 6:44).

Compassion (v8a): In spite of our sin, God had compassion on us, and did what

needed to be done. Through the cross, God paid a great price so that salvation would be available to us (cf. Romans 5:8; John 3:16).

Commanded (v6b): In the illustration, God told the child to live. This command is just as valid for us today. He did not save us to watch us die, but to give us everlasting life through His Son (cf. John 3:16; 6:47).

Covered (v8a): In the illustration the Lord covered the baby's nakedness. In the same way, when we were saved He covered our nakedness and we entered into a place of shelter with the Lord. In this shelter, we are forever safe from God's wrath (cf. Romans 5:9) and any who would try to snatch us from Him (cf. John 10:28).

Claimed (v8b): In Bible times, when a man found a woman that he desired to have as his wife, he would spread his garment over her claiming her as his own (cf. Ruth 3:9). This is the picture here, God was claiming the child for Himself. When we were saved, we too were claimed by the Lord, adopting us into His family (cf. Ephesians 1:5).

Covenant (v8c): A covenant is different to a contract: a contract can be broken, but a covenant is eternal and binding. When we were saved, God entered into a covenant with us by giving us a salvation that is eternal. Even if we fail on our part, God will never fail on His.

Cleansed (v9a): When the Lord saved us, He did not just whitewash our lives, but washed us whiter than snow (cf. Isaiah 1:18). Every stain left on us by our sin was cleansed away by the blood of Jesus (cf. 1 John 1:7).

Cured (v9b): In Bible times oil was used as a medicine. In a spiritual sense, we have been cured from the curse of our sinful natures and made into new creatures (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Consecrated (v9b): Oil was also used to anoint kings and priests as they were set apart for service (cf. 1 Samuel 16:13). When we were saved we were set apart for His use and have been consecrated for His glory. Therefore, we have no right to do anything that does not glorify God.

As you can see, as believers we have been blessed with some amazing gifts of grace. But, it does not stop there.

WONDERFUL CHANGE (vv10-14)

Clothed (v10a): This illustration shows that the Lord clothed the baby in the finest of garments. He has done the same for us. Though we cannot see it with our physical eyes, every child of God has been gloriously clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself (cf. Isaiah 61:10; Galatians 3:27).

Improved (vv11-14): The Lord also blessed the child with all the things to make her look the best she possibly could. He took her, changed her completely and made her life a thing of great beauty. By saving us, blessing us, changing us, gifting us and using us, He has made us far better than we

ever could have been otherwise. He took the most wretched of lives and transformed them into trophies of His grace and power.

Crowned (v12): The Lord then took this child and made her His queen. By God's grace we were saved and have been promised that we will be with Him in His throne room (cf. Revelation 4:1-11).

Changed (v14): The Lord made a difference in the child to the extent that she became the envy of the world. He made a change in her and all the world wanted what she had. What a picture of what the Lord has done for us all. Originally neglected and abandoned, we are now loved, cared for, and wanted! By His power we have been changed and made into new creatures by His grace (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). Now that we are different than before, others look upon us with envy. Though not everyone will, there are those in the world who would like something of what we now have because of Christ.

Conclusion

God took the nation of Israel, saved them by His grace and put them on display to show what His grace can do for all mankind. His desire is to do the same today. We are to be transformed by Him and put on display for the world to see the glory of God's grace.

If you continue to read in chapter 16, you will see that Jerusalem took God's blessings and despised them. In verse 15 we read that they played the harlot against God in that they chased and served other Gods. As God changes each one of us, let us learn from the errors of Israel and not do the same thing. Let us continue to pursue Him and rest in His grace.

Let us rejoice today in the knowledge that we are saved. Let us come before Him with thanksgiving in our hearts and recognise all that He has done for us.

Finally, let us continue to trust in Him and ask Him to protect us and keep us from any that may try to snatch us from Him.

Let us live in the glory of God's grace. Amen. †

God will never fail

We have been transformed by His grace

INSPIRATIONAL CLASSIC

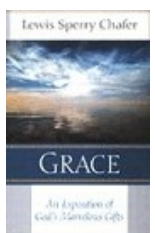
Grace

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

No one word in the Bible more fully describes God's plans and purposes than "grace", and no one work more fully expounds the multi-faceted nature of God's grace than this classic work.

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) was a highly-regarded Bible teacher and founder of the Dallas Theological Seminary.

An excellent reference text on the subject for pastors, Bible students and Bible teachers.



R 150

THE BACK PAGE

BIBLE TRIVIA CHALLENGE

How well do you know the book of Ezekiel?

Refer to the verses in brackets for help.

ACROSS

3. God used Babylon to judge who? (21:2)
6. Teman and Dedan were towns in which country? (25:13)
7. The Lord accused Israel of abusing God's what? (20:16)
8. What was the name of the Pharaoh the Lord is against in 29:3?
11. How does God describe His temple in Ezekiel 5:11?
13. By which river in Babylon was Ezekiel when he received his first message from the Lord? (1:3)
17. For how many days did Ezekiel have to lie on his right side? (4:6)
20. What nation does the Lord say He will punish in chapter 30?
21. The members of which family served the Lord faithfully? (48:11)
22. How old was Ezekiel when he was taken in captivity? (1:1)
23. In which year after being taken into captivity did a man escape and inform Ezekiel of the fall of Jerusalem? (33:21)
24. In chapter 31 the Lord compares Assyria to what type of tree? (31:3)
25. The Lord called Israel's prophets "wild ___ that live among broken-down buildings." (13:4)
27. What relation of Ezekiel's dies in chapter 24?
28. The city of Baal Meon was found in which country? (25:9)

DOWN

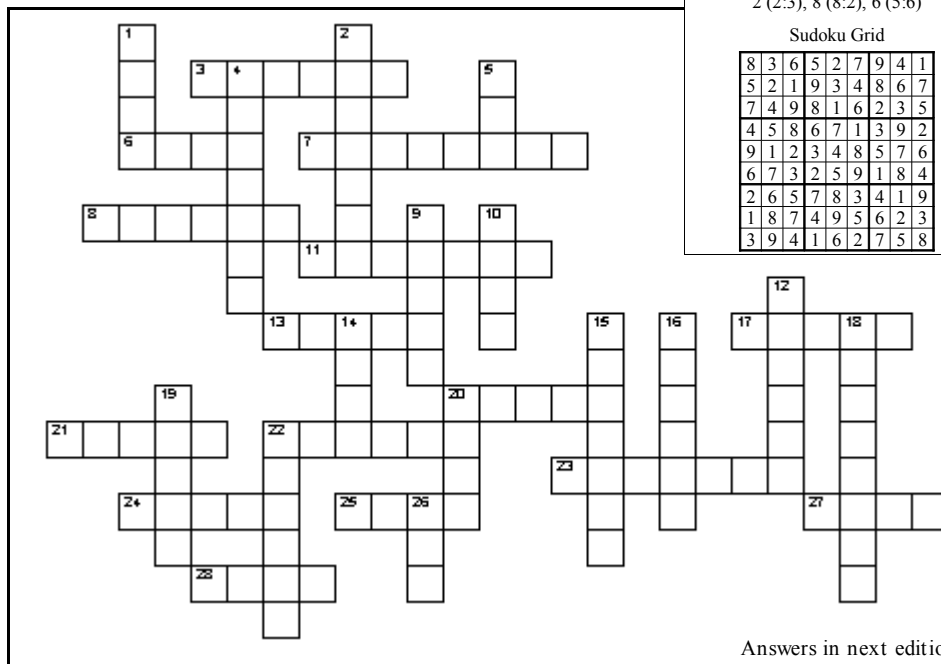
1. In chapter 15 the Lord calls Jerusalem a useless what?
2. Complete: "A great eagle came to the city of ___" (17:3)
4. Who was described alongside Jerusalem as wicked sisters? (23)
5. In chapter 24 the Lord compared Israel to what?
9. The main theme of Ezekiel is the ___ of God.
10. The Lord calls Israel an abandoned what in chapter 16?
12. Which tribe was to have two shares of the land of Israel? (47:13)
14. What was Ezekiel's father's name? (1:3)
15. The people of Tyre described Jerusalem as the what to the nations? (26:2)
16. In chapters 40 to 42 the Lord describes what building?
18. Where were the ships from that carried the products of the nation of Tyre? (27:25)
19. What were in the valley that the Lord brought to life in Ezekiel's vision? (37:1)
20. What were on all four rims of the wheels? (1:18)
22. The Lord told king Zedekiah to remove what along with his crown? (21:26)
26. Who was the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal? (38:2)

Last Month's Solution

Trivia: 5, 4 (4:6), 3 (3:22-23), 9 (4:9), 7 (1:7), 1 (3:25), 2 (2:3), 8 (8:2), 6 (5:6)

Sudoku Grid

8	3	6	5	2	7	9	4	1
5	2	1	9	3	4	8	6	7
7	4	9	8	1	6	2	3	5
4	5	8	6	7	1	3	9	2
9	1	2	3	4	8	5	7	6
6	7	3	2	5	9	1	8	4
2	6	5	7	8	3	4	1	9
1	8	7	4	9	5	6	2	3
3	9	4	1	6	2	7	5	8



Answers in next edition

GOD'S LIBRARY CARDS

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EZRA

15

Key Idea: Rebuilding the Temple

Summary: A group of Jews returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple

Key People: Zerubbabel, Ezra

Key Places: Babylon, Jerusalem in Judah

Strange but True: A pagan king returning the Temple furniture to the Jews (1:7).

The only library mentioned in the Bible (6:1-2).

712 animals offered in sacrifice at the dedication of the temple (6:17).

An angry priest who tore his clothes and pulled out his own hair (9:1-3).

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NEHEMIAH

16

Key Idea: Rebuilding the Walls

Summary: A group of Jews returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls

Key People: Nehemiah, Ezra, Sanballat, Tobiah

Key Places: Shushan in Persia, Jerusalem in Judah

Strange but True: Gates with strange names like Fish, Hors and Dung (3:1-32).

The walls of an entire city completed in only 52 days (6:15).

An angry governor who pulled out people's hair (13:23-25).

An official thrown out of his home by a servant (13:8).

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Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Ezekiel 1:28

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