

Two Billion Reasons To Celebrate



THE Lord has richly blessed the ministry efforts of the Gideons as they have just shared the Two Billionth Scripture since they began Bible placements in 1908. Praise the Lord!

Gideons say 'Thank you for your prayers and support.' Behind every number is a face, behind every face a story, and behind every story a priceless soul. This is a wonderful message to share with all churches and friends.

To celebrate what God has accomplished, Gideons international members will present a Two Billionth Commemorative Bible to as many of the leaders as possible in the 200 countries, territories, and possessions in which they are organized.

It is interesting to note that the distribution of the first one billion Bibles and New Testaments spanned 93 years (from 1908 to 2001). This second billion was attained in less than 14 years (from 2002 to 2015).

The Gideons ask for continued prayer for opportunities to reach more souls than ever before with God's life-changing Word.

— Craig Warner, Executive Director.

Videos Of Christians Forgiving Islamic State Go Viral In The Arab World

AN extraordinary series of videos of Christians forgiving Islamic State have gone viral in the Arab world. SAT-7's Egypt Director sees the impact of the *Resistance Through Forgiveness* videos of a 10-year-old Iraqi displaced by Islamic State and of a brother of two Egyptian labourers beheaded in Libya, both voicing forgiveness for their persecutors, have been watched by a million viewers and have drawn the attention of mainstream Arab media, which rarely covers Christian news. Under the title *Iraqi Girl Myriam Faces ISIS With Love*, pan-Arab broadcaster *Al Arabiya* told how the clip of young refugee Myriam had spread via social media and was impressing ordinary viewers and media commentators.

A columnist in the Lebanese newspaper *Al Nahar* said the SAT-7 interview with her 'should be presented in Lebanese schools as a lesson in humanity.' Farid Samir, Egypt Director of Christian satellite channel SAT-7, which made both clips, said: 'The massive interest in them shows the impact of resisting violence through forgiveness.'

SAT-7 Founder and CEO Terrence Ascott added 'In a climate in which world media has highlighted IS' use of social media to recruit people set on violence and to document acts intended to spread terror, the SAT-7 clips spread a radically different message.'

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AUSTRALIA'S CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

Chan And Sukumaran – Forward In Faith

REPORTING for Sydney Christian Radio Station Hope FM, Clare Chate says: 'While Australians poured out their strong emotions on social media and journalists debated international politics, those close to Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran quietly rested on their belief that both are now in a better place.'

An Indonesian correspondent told Fairfax media that all eight prisoners, executed in the early hours of the morning, sang praise songs to God including *Amazing Grace* and *Bless The Lord, Oh My Soul*, as they walked, unblindfolded, to face their firing squad.

Pastor Rob Buckingham of Bayside Church in Melbourne, whose wife Christie attended the execution as a spiritual support, spoke to Radio 3AW about their deaths. He said that his wife's first text message after the killing spoke of Chan and Sukumaran's strength. 'These boys conducted themselves with great dignity and strength and they were strong right to the end,' he said.

Pastoral Care Co-ordinator of the Buckingham's church, Sandra Cavallo, was one of a group of Christians who had met and visited the men in prison over the past two years. She told Hope Media that despite her great sadness, she was comforted knowing of their strong faith. 'We're sad that our two friends have gone but I also know that they're in a very good place, so it's a bitter/sweet thing at the moment.'

For myself, I am just so thankful that 'the arm of the Lord is not shortened that He cannot save', so that Christ haters like Saul of Tarsus, slave traders like John Newton, sharp lawyers like Charles Colson, and drug runners like Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran can be saved by the amazing Grace of God – and I am so glad that 'Jesus loves even me.' Oh yes, and I want to again pay tribute to Rob and Christie Buckingham who went so far beyond the call of duty and were so greatly used by the Lord in bringing these two to saving faith and new life in Christ.

Whoever we are, whatever we have done, however far we have drifted away from God, we can return to Him and find forgiveness and new life in Christ, for He is 'able to save to the uttermost, all who come to the Father through Him' (Hebrews 7.25).
– Bob Thomas

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INDIA: Consequences Of Hindutva Propaganda

HINDUTVA (militant Hindu nationalism) propaganda calls for Hindu solidarity to ward off the threat posed by Christianity which is slandered and vilified as an existential threat to Indian culture, social cohesion and national security. Hindutva activists target Adivasis ('first inhabitants': members of indigenous tribes) for conversion to Hinduism (pursuing religious conversion for political gain). It is to that end they also seek to eliminate Christian witness and conversion. With Hindutva protagonists now dominating power in India, it is little wonder that paranoia-inspired violence with impunity is on the increase. Unless there is change, this will only get worse.

ASSAM, in India's far north-east, has a major problem with mass illegal immigration from Bangladesh, with an estimated 6,000 Bengali Muslims arriving in Assam every day. Eleven of Assam's 27 districts now have Muslim majorities and as Muslims impose their culture and compete for land, jobs and power, ethnic-religious tensions escalate, making Assam fertile ground for Hindutva activism. Virtually all Assam's Christians are Adivasis (first inhabitants). In December 2014, after a resident of Amtola village, Golpara District, was healed of cancer through Christian prayer, five families from the Rabha clan began attending worship services. Since then, the Amtola church – particularly the new Christians – have faced hostility, including regular attacks which the police have ignored.

JHARKHAND, in India's northern tribal belt, is known for its grinding poverty and its Naxalite (Maoist) insurgency. [Maoists in Nepal and India are not driven by ideology as much as their opposition to the systematic racism and gross inequity of the Hindu caste system.] In Jharkhand, nearly one-third of the population is Adivasi, making this a catchment area for Hindutva activists and a conflict zone for Naxalites. In recent months, Hindutva activists with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad ('All Indian Student Council') have been escalating their attacks on church-run schools in Jharkhand. The ABPV, the student wing of the RSS (a Hindu paramilitary), claims to be protesting the schools' high fees, but church-run schools receive no government assistance.

CHHATTISGARH, like Jharkhand, is also in the tribal belt, desperately poor and at the heart of the Naxalite insurgency. Voice of the Martyrs Canada has just confirmed the martyrdom of Christian evangelist 'Brother Sadavir', in Dantewada which adjoins the volatile Bastar region in southern Chhattisgarh. Despite being attacked in 2010 and 2012, Brother Sadavir (who was married with three young children) refused to stop sharing his faith in Jesus Christ. Brother Sadavir was killed by a mix of Koya tribesmen and Naxalites. The Koya, who are protesting conversions, got the Naxalites on side by telling them that Brother Sadavir was paying people to convert (ie he was exploiting their poverty) and was betraying Naxals to the Hindu nationalist government. Both charges were false. Refusing to release the body to the family, the killers then burned Sadavir's remains so to destroy all evidence.

– Elizabeth Kendal, international religious liberty analyst and advocate, Adjunct Research Fellow in the Centre for the Study of Islam and Other Faiths at the Melbourne School of Theology. She is Director of Advocacy for Christian Faith & Freedom, Canberra.

NIGERIA – Christian Town Under Attack

– PLEASE PRAY NOW

The Christian town of Rim in the Riyom local government area of Plateau state is currently under attack by unknown gunmen.

Two people are confirmed dead. Please pray NOW for our brothers and sisters; that they will know the presence of God and His protection. This attack is the latest on Christian villages in Plateau this week.

Suspected Fulani herdsmen raided Rakung village in the Barkin Ladi area of Plateau and were 'terrorising the area'. Two children are reported to have been killed, 'gunned down on their way to school', and farmers have been forced off their land. – releaseinternational.org

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- whether by choice (a shift in conscience) or by virtue of increased international pressure, there will be a commitment amongst local governments, business leaders and police in India to reject violence, uphold the law and promote civility and decency.
- God will raise up voices of peace and reason at every level throughout India, equipping them and blessing their advocacy for the sake of the Church.
- the Lord will refine and sanctify the Indian Church; may the Holy Spirit move powerfully in believers facing intensive pressure, so they will be assured in their hearts that Jesus will never leave or forsake them.
- the Lord Jesus Christ will continue to build His Church in India, and that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Matthew 16.18 ESV); may many more Indians find peace, grace and dignity in Jesus as He adds to their number daily. (Acts 2.42-47)

'I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people

– for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.'

(1 Timothy 2.1-4 ESV)

An App To Use In Witnessing



The Parting Gift is a six minute film produced by Campus Crusade in Melbourne, which presents the Gospel in a modern day setting. The film clip is part of an app designed to take people through a series of steps to bring them to faith in Christ.

So far it has been downloaded 532 times and used 375 times to present the Gospel. Six people in Australia and 15 people in the Philippines have responded positively to the message. Perhaps the most encouraging statistic is the 192 people who have indicated they want to meet again to learn how to become a Christian.

The production is the brainchild of Chris Bailey, who joined Campus Crusade after working in Hollywood and the Australian film industry. It tells the story of a young man who misses his girlfriend at a train station and pursues her with a parting gift as a token of his love. This illustrates God's love for us as He pursues us through life with the message of His Gospel.

The film was partly financed with Crowd Funding, which raised over \$10,000 in record time. Professional actors were employed and a number of people volunteered their time and equipment, which made the project possible.

The app can be downloaded for free from <http://www.wondergatefilms.com/films/the-parting-gift>

Another Helpful Tool For Evangelism

THE *Introducing God* series has been good for St Paul's Anglican Church in Carlingford (Sydney). Play the video at <http://www.introducinggod.org/stories> to hear Dave Keun, who heads up Evangelism at St Paul's, explain why *Introducing God* has been good for their church.

St Paul's has run two *Introducing God* courses in the last twelve months and Dave says, '*Introducing God* has provided a pathway ... where we can pull together people and help them understand the thing we hold so dear. The platform is great, and it's been useful in giving lots of different people places to serve in.'

Introducing God could help other churches share Jesus in their area, whether as a 1:1 between friends, a small group in someone's home or in a large course setting.

To find out more or order copies of the new course, call 02 9660 2444 or check out the *Introducing God* website at www.introducinggod.org



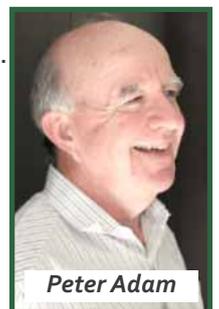
A Passion for Truth – Preaching Doctrine In The Contemporary Culture

A CONFERENCE on preaching for pastors and lay preachers will be held by Ridley Melbourne at El Kanah Guest House, 975 Buxton-Marysville Road, Marysville, Vic from Tuesday 25 to Thursday 27 August. The speakers will be Peter Adam and Peter Jensen.

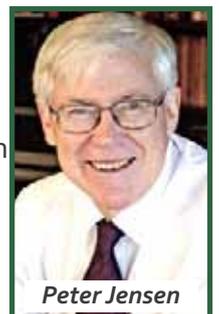
Peter Adam has served as Vicar of St Jude's Carlton, and Principal of Ridley College.

Peter Jensen is well known as a leader among evangelical Anglican thinkers and churches. The former Archbishop of Sydney continues to serve as the General Secretary of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, which emerged from GAFCON in 2008.

For more details go to: <http://www.ridley.edu.au/events/event/passion-truth/>



Peter Adam



Peter Jensen



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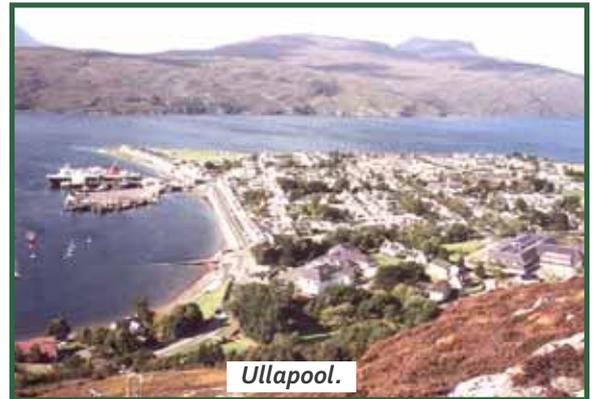
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'THEIR WORD GOES OUT ...'

Scriptures For Seafarers – Casting Bread Upon The Waters

IN June 2014 the Free Church of Scotland congregation in Ullapool—a small port in the northwest Highlands of Scotland—gave a Bible to every home in the community. A few weeks later two copies turned up in Blythswood Care's Ross-shire headquarters which processes as much as 20 tonnes a week of clothes, bric-a-brac, books, and other second-hand household goods. Blythswood in turn donated these Bibles along with others to the Seafarer's Centre in Invergordon, a Christian outreach which serves thousands of crew members from the huge cruise ships and cargo vessels which visit the port each year.



Ullapool.

Says Sailor's Society port chaplain Drew Anderson: 'We give out many hundreds of Bibles and don't know where they will go or who will read them. But the Lord knows.' In 2014, Blythswood Care provided the Seafarer's Centre with Bibles and Christian literature in 18 languages. The Centre was visited by 4,336 crew members from 91 vessels. Many ships, staffed by men and women from all around the world, have Christian fellowships which meet regularly, with English usually being the shared language.

– *Blythswood News, December 2014, quoted in Banner Of Truth Magazine No. 619.*

MEET: Richard Coombs, New Chairman Of Belgrave Heights Convention

REV Richard Coombs has been appointed the new Chair of the Belgrave Heights Convention. David Price, who has been Chair since 1997, will formally resign as Chair at the BHC Council meeting on 14 May.

Richard is originally from New Zealand, and since 2002 has been the Australasian Director of Middle East Christian Outreach. He has had long experience in Baptist pastoral ministry in New Zealand at Wanganui and Hamilton, and then in Australia at Beaumaris and North Balwyn Baptist churches.

Richard says – 'I was privileged to have been brought up in a Christian home and family. My father was a Baptist minister, I had an uncle who was a Presbyterian minister, an aunty who was with China Inland Mission for three years in China and then 35 years in Japan with Overseas Missionary Fellowship, and another aunty who worked among the Maori people of New Zealand for 42 years.

'I made a personal commitment to follow Jesus when I was 13. I have been privileged to have had many missionaries, preachers and mission statesmen stay in our home – J. Oswald Sanders, Norman McIntosh, Michael Griffiths, John Stott, Alan Redpath, to name a few.

'Through the years of theological study in Auckland, Margaret and I seriously considered going to Bangladesh with the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society, but health precluded this at that point. We then committed ourselves to supporting mission work and encouraging churches and individuals to be actively involved in mission work throughout our pastorates. In all our churches we had the privilege of sending workers to cross-cultural ministries in other countries.

'We are blessed with three sons who are all involved in church life, with two of them currently involved in fulltime Christian ministry (one for Global Interaction and one in a pastoral position with City On A Hill Anglican Church).

We're Encouraged!
One Of Australia's Major Mission Agencies
has advised us
they send each edition of *New Life*
around to everyone in the office
and to the members of their
National Council.
**Who Can YOU Forward
New Life To?**



'It is a privilege to be appointed Council Chair of BHC. Preachers in past days have impacted my personal walk with God, and I look forward to working with the Council to bring the best available preachers to BHC. There is much to be done in bringing the 'good news of Jesus' to Melbourne and Victoria. I believe that our various conventions have a strategic role in this. Inspiring worship, transformational and practical Bible teaching, corporate prayer and Christian fellowship can be a powerful witness to us being "all one in Christ Jesus".'

The BHC Council values the prayers and partnership of God's people as Richard takes up this important role in addition to his leadership of MECO.

'... YOU DID IT UNTO ME'

'I Escaped But My Family Was Killed'

– Migrants Say Faith Was A Factor In Their Forced Flight To Europe

AMONG the record numbers of migrants from Africa and Asia who are dying in European waters, many are fleeing war and poverty, but there also is a religious dimension: many migrants are Christians, unable to freely practise their faith in their home countries.

According to World Watch Monitor (www.worldwatchmonitor.org), at least 1,750 people have died in the Mediterranean Sea already this year, more than 20 times the number at this stage last year. The Mediterranean has become a 'giant reflecting pool, exposing the unrelenting evil and despair that is loose in our world,' Thomas Albinson, President of the US-based International Association for Refugees, recently wrote. 'Trace the steps of those on the boats, and you will find your way back to wars, failed states, persecution, oppression and hopelessness.'

More than 5,800 were rescued from overladen boats in early May, and nearly 900 desperate souls landed on Italy's shores just on 4 May, reports the BBC.

There, some of them likely met Enos Nolli, who is director of Sicily-based GiM Italia (Generations In Mission), a Christian organization that, since 2011, has supported more than 6,000 refugees from more than 50 countries, who have survived perilous journeys over land and sea.

'Many escaped from countries at war, others from countries where poverty is very great,' Nolli told World Watch Monitor. 'Many others [fled] because they are in danger for political reasons, and others just for being Christian. These [Christians] mainly ran away from Muslim countries and many of them, whom we met here in Sicily in the refugee camps where we work, came from Pakistan, Iran, Northern Nigeria, Eritrea, Senegal, Mali, Gambia, Niger, Somalia, Egypt and Libya.' Nolli said GiM's refugee centres in Mineo and Caltanissetta, in Sicily's interior, are now 'totally full.' Migrants are scattered throughout parks, railway stations, abandoned buildings, he said. The authorities are caught between complaints from residents and the impossibility of providing shelter to everyone.

He said he soon hopes to start a new base in Sicily's eastern port city of Catania, which he said has become a 'veritable clearing house' for refugees, who, once they've undergone lengthy and uncertain asylum processes, can travel to other European nations. Catania's international airport is also used to send back hundreds of migrants whose asylum requests are turned down.

'New people arrive every day,' Nolli said, 'and every time we visit we meet new faces and hear new hard stories.'

– Dan Wooding, Founder of ASSIST Ministries



Migrants helped by the Red Cross in Sicily, Italy

ENJOY SPEAKERS Prof Andy McIntosh,
Dr Ron Neller, John Mackay,
Dr Diane Eager, Steve Cardno,
Dr John Osgood, Craig Hawkins

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Church Concern As NSW Government Bets Both Ways

THE President of the NSW Council of Churches has welcomed the Baird Government's response to a recent Legislative Council inquiry into the impact of gambling, but says the government's proposed reforms do not go far enough in addressing public health concerns. Council President, the Rev Dr Ross Clifford, expressed concern at the Baird government's announcement that it would not support certain recommendations including reduced maximum bets and jackpots, and restrictions on cash availability near poker machine venues. 'We are disappointed that the government won't even agree to review current practice, let alone make the changes recommended in the inquiry report,' Dr Clifford said. 'Gambling reform is a significant moral and social issue of concern to churches and community groups, and must not be put on the back burner in favour of seemingly more popular issues. While there is some good news in the government's response, there is much more that should be done in the interests of public health and harm minimisation.



'We urge the NSW Government to apply a freeze on the transfer of entitlements between gaming venues and the creation of any new entitlements, in order to address urgent concerns regarding the concentration of poker machines in neighbourhoods and clubs where they are likely to create greater harm to local communities.

Life And Faith: Their Sacrifice

FROM the Boer War and World War I right up to Afghanistan, Iraq, and beyond, the Bible Society has freely given Scriptures to all members of the Australian Defence Forces who wanted them. With the centenary of the Gallipoli campaign, the Bible Society has brought together unexpected and moving stories of servicemen and women who fought for their country, many sacrificing their lives, and of the book they took with them into combat.

Life and Faith speaks with Dr John Harris, who did most of the research behind the *Their Sacrifice* campaign, about the experiences of some of these remarkable individuals, as well as National Campaigns Manager Allan Dowthwaite about the exhibition touring Australia over the coming year. For more information about the *Their Sacrifice* exhibition, the accompanying book, and *The Bullet in the Bible* DVD, visit www.theirsacrifice.com

– Simon Smart, Colin Bale

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'Catacomb Church' In Coober Pedy Reaching Out

GEOFF and Tracey Piggott, supported by Bush Church Aid, are hard at work in Coober Pedy, South Australia's underground opal mining town. Like most dwellings there, the church is underground, hence 'Catacomb Church', a tourist attraction in itself. But the Piggotts don't spend all their time underground. They entered a float in the Opal Festival Parade, reminding the town that BCA established the hospital there 50 years ago. Easter services were packed and a great celebration. An outreach team from Lauriton, NSW, helped in distributing Tourist Bags filled with Christian literature and treats, establishing a garden and sign to the church and showing visitors around the points of interest of the church.



John Smith's New Book Launched

JOHN Smith's new book, *Beyond The Myth Of Self-Esteem*, was launched on 16 April in Melbourne by the host of ABC local radio's *Sunday Nights* program, John Cleary. John Smith, who founded the Christian motor cycle group God's Squad, addresses a number of myths about self-esteem currently in Australian society. Launching the book, John Cleary said he hoped that many people would benefit from what John Smith had written and the book was utterly consistent with his passionate commitment to tackle the hard issues facing Australian society.

— Paul Arnott

Mid-Week Lectures At Nungalinga College

THE Rev Dr Bruce Kaye, Adjunct Research Professor, Centre for Public and Contextual Theology at Charles Sturt University, will deliver three lectures at Nungalinga College, Darwin. The Mid-Week Lectures are open to the public and presented as a service to the Christian Community at no charge. The lecture series will run on Wednesdays 29 July, 5 and 12 August. These will be substantial lectures suitable for thoughtful students of the Bible. Pastors are especially encouraged to attend the lectures on the theme *Living The Gospel In Different Cultures - Paul As Cross-Cultural Apostle*.

1. *Being A Christian In An Imperial City (Philippi)*.
 2. *Being A Christian In A Free City (Thessalonica)*.
 3. *Being A Christian In A Cosmopolitan City (Corinth)*
- Each of these cities is identifiably different and the way Paul presented the Gospel and built a church was also discernibly different in each place.

Our Daily Bread Ministries' Preaching Seminar

ODB Ministries invites pastors and church leaders to join them at their next Pastors and Church Lead-

ers Morning (in Drouin and Lavington), where Rev Mike Raiter, the Director of the Centre of Biblical Preaching in Melbourne and former Principal of the Melbourne School of Theology, will share about how we can learn and preach from *Colossians*. Teaching from *Colossians* can be a challenging yet rewarding experience. Though relatively short, Paul's letter packs doctrinal as well as practical content on the pre-eminence of Christ, His ministry, and what it means to live in Him and with each other. There will be two sessions in July: in Lavington, NSW, on Tuesday 28 July from 10am to 12.30pm, at Albury Presbyterian Church, and on Friday 31 July from 9.30 am to 12pm in the Drouin Presbyterian Church. To register, call (03) 9761 7086 or email australia@odb.org. There is no admission charge and lunch will be provided.

Annual Leon Morris Lecture

THE Annual Leon Morris Lecture will be held at Ridley Melbourne, 170 The Avenue Parkville, on Thursday 28 May at 7.30pm. The lecture is titled *Singing And Identity In The Early Church* and will be delivered by Dr Eckhard Schnabel, a noted New Testament scholar from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, with over 30 years of extensive experience in teaching, ministry, research and scholarship.

National Prayer Breakfast

THE Parliamentary Christian Fellowship extends an invitation to the Australian National Prayer Breakfast in Parliament House Canberra on Sunday 13 and Monday 14 September. Further details are available from: National Prayer Breakfast, C/O Office of Louise Markus MP, PO Box 855, Windsor NSW 2756.

God's Winsome And Wonderful Grace In The Life Of Elisha – 2 Kings 2-13

MURRAY Capill with his wife Wendy and two of their five children were welcomed to the Belgrave Heights Convention for the second time. Murray grew up in Christchurch, New Zealand. His parents had spent time in London under the ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones and then as missionaries in Cameroon. Murray always knew God's plan of salvation, and the process of surrendering to the Lord. At 16, he started to read Christian books that impacted him greatly. He is now Principal of The Reformed Theological College in Geelong, where he teaches preaching and pastoral care. He loves the privilege of being able to invest time in other people's lives; people who have willingly set aside years to study God's Word. At BHC we really appreciated Murray's expertise in explaining wonderful lessons from Elisha's life, showing their relevance to the present day.

Elisha: Days Of Grace – 2 Kings 2:1-25

Elijah means 'My God is Yahweh;' Elisha means 'My God saves.' Elijah's ministry was of judgment but Elisha demonstrated grace. His life was a continual foretaste of Jesus' ministry. God is working in all things. He helps us deal with situations that will one day be made plain. He is working today as He was in the past.

1. God's plan. God is the perfect planner. Elijah's era of fire and judgment is over; Elisha's era of grace and salvation is about to begin. Elijah is a picture of John the Baptist, paving the way for God's grace ushered in with Jesus, as foreseen in Elisha's time.

2. God's power. God's plan requires God's power. Elisha made a bold request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. He was not seeking worldly wealth, but the inheritance of the first born. Only God can grant this petition, so Elijah replies in a way to allow God to do His will. Elijah's spirit did remain with Elisha so he picked up his mantle, flung it on the water, which parted for him to cross. Jesus departed this life so His Spirit could be with us always, empowering and enabling us

3. God's people. The water being cleansed at Jericho, v.19-21, was a sign of blessing, renewal and healing. Bears mauling the youths at Bethel v.23-24 was a sign of cursing on all those who reject God's ministry. There is always a flip-side to grace: blessing and healing for those who receive it; judgment and death for those who reject it.

Elisha: Grace That Saves The Day – 2 Kings 4:1-44

Elijah's ministry was focused on great events; Elisha's work centred on ordinary people. The sons of the prophets were a significant group of faithful preachers, with Elisha as their mentor and teacher.

1. Four situations of need. Three of these were about food when Israel was in the middle of a famine!

a) The poor widow was soon to have her sons taken as payment for her debt. They were the ones who needed to care for her.

b) The childless woman was wealthy, generous and content in her life. But childlessness held a social stigma.

c) The hapless cook included some poisonous gourds in the stew, causing stomach cramps for all who ate.

d) The desperate caterer had inadequate supplies. He failed to understand how 20 small loaves could feed 100 hungry prophets.

Ordinary situations are life for God's people. Pain and hardship are part of living. But God still cares!

2. Four cries of desperation.

a) The widow's cry. She lays her situation before Elisha without a petition; she just states the facts.

b) The woman's complaint. She is utterly distraught as she complains to Elisha about her God-given son's untimely death.

c) The cook's crisis. 'There's death in the pot!' he tells Elisha. How awful to be blamed for poisoning your brethren.

d) The caterer's dismay. Elisha told him to 'Feed the people!' It seemed an impossible order to fulfill.

They all pour out their problems to Elisha. He bears God's name. He is God's representative. We can go to One far greater; the ultimate, supreme Prophet of God. We can leave every grief and burden with Him. He cares for us.

3. Four provisions of grace. The widow received a life-time of financial support. The woman's son was restored to life. The stew became nourishing food. Bread was distributed to 100 men. These are all wonderful outcomes of grace. But miracles are signs that point people back to God. *(Continued on Page 12)*

PERSECUTION WATCH

Boko Haram Freed Women Tell Of Captivity Horror

FORMER hostages held by Boko Haram militants in northern Nigeria say some fellow captives were stoned to death as the army approached to rescue them. According to the BBC, the women said Boko Haram fighters started pelting them when they refused to run away as the army came nearer. 'A group of nearly 300 women and children was brought out of the vast Sambisa Forest to a government camp,' said the BBC story. 'The military says it has rescued more than 700 people in the past week in an offensive against the Islamist group. The women said several were killed in the stoning, but they did not know how many.'



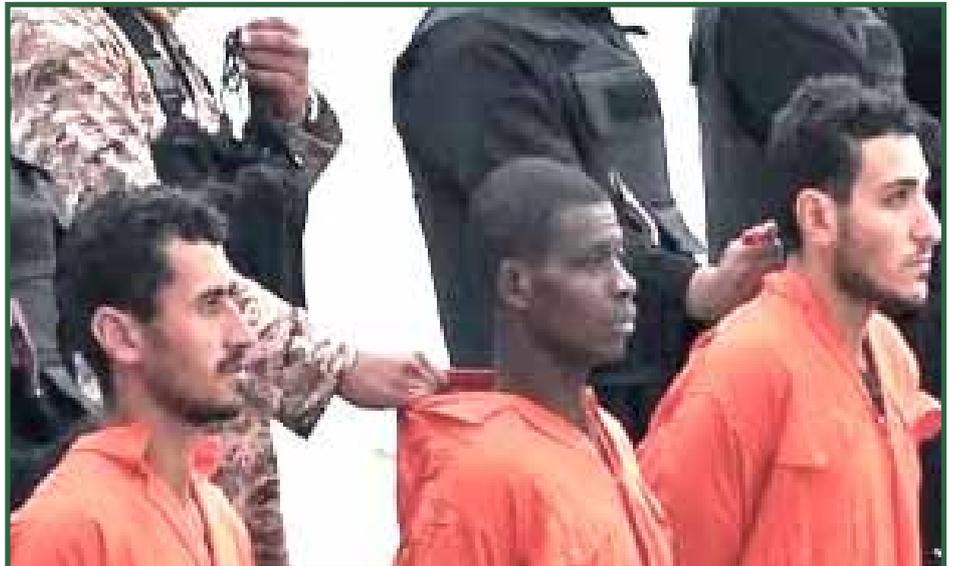
SOME of the rescued women from Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria (ANS – 3 May 2015)

The survivors said that when they were initially captured, the militants had killed men and older boys in front of their families before taking women and children into the forest. Some were forced into marriage. They said the Islamists never let them out of their sight – not even when they went to the toilet.

'They didn't allow us to move an inch,' one of the freed women, Asabe Umaru, told Reuters news agency. 'We were kept in one place. We were under bondage.'
– Dan Wooding, ASSIST News Service

'Their God Is My God' – Chadian Among Coptic Christians Killed

FOLLOWING the martyrdom of Coptic Christian men by Libyan Islamic State militants in February 2015, the names of 21 of the martyrs were widely shared. The martyrs were kidnapped from Sirte, Libya, where they were working. Initially it was believed that all of the men killed for their faith were from small villages in Egypt. However, the name and background of one of those killed, a black man, was unknown. Mathew Ayairga was soon identified by friends after



being recognized in video footage of the killings released by IS. According to *Ahram-Canadian News*, Mathew was from Chad. Mathew had gone missing in January 2015, captured by one of the radical groups in Libya who have kidnapped hundreds, both Muslim and Christian.

The video made public on 15 February shows each of the men dressed in orange jumpsuits, kneeling on a beach, with their black-clothed attackers standing behind them. Each one is systematically beheaded, and the video clearly shows many of the men praying 'Lord Jesus Christ' in their final moments.

According to reports, Mathew Ayairga was not a Christian. However, when moments before his death the IS extremists demanded that he follow Islam, Mathew turned them down. After reportedly witnessing the 'immense faith' of the Egyptian believers, he decided to become a follower of Christ.

On camera, one of the terrorists asked Matthew, 'Do you reject Christ?' 'Their God is my God,' he responded, and he became one of the 21 men laying down their lives for their faith in Christ.

(Shades of 'The Forty Martyrs Of Sebaste' – Ed.)

– Lindsay Steele, Reported By Voice Of The Martyrs

Kazakhstan Baptist Facing Three Years In Gaol For Breaking State Censorship?

A BAPTIST, Nikolai Novikov, could face up to three years in gaol for refusing to pay a 2013 fine for offering religious literature on the streets which has not been censored by the state. According to a story by Felix Corley for the *Forum 18 News Service*, Novikov has refused to pay that and other fines, saying they are unjust. Prosecutor Aydin Rashidov has repeatedly claimed that as Novikov's crime was of what he described as 'middling seriousness,' if convicted Novikov would not be imprisoned.

However, Novikov has pointed out that the prosecution is illegal under Kazakhstan's law.

– Jeremy Reynolds, Senior Correspondent, ASSIST News Service (jeremyreynolds@gmail.com)

'GRACE! GRACE! MARVELOUS GRACE!'

(Continued from Page 10) Only God can restore, heal, save and provide. These signs foretell Jesus' ministry.

Elisha: Grace That's Hard To Take – 2 Kings 5.1-27

1. Meet Naaman: a story of amazing grace in action. He is a foreigner, a terrorist, and unclean because of leprosy – an incurable, socially stigmatized disease. Yet he was a great commander of Aram's army. God chose a young Israelite slave girl to point him to the healer, God's prophet. She must have experienced all sorts of harrowing experiences, yet she still trusted God.

1. God's grace is available to all kinds of people. There are no prerequisites to God's grace. God often uses people we least expect. Beware of judging by appearances.

2. Off to the King of Israel. Naaman takes a huge tribute to pay Israel's king, who thinks it's a plot to discredit him. But Elisha hears and sends his servant with the message to dip seven times in the Jordan River – a rather offensive order.

3. Grace strips us of our pride. Naaman had to forget his rank, the reception he expected, and all the beautiful Syrian rivers. He had to humbly to submit himself to Elisha's instructions.

4. Freed from his leprosy – after the seventh dip. We too are cleansed from sin by trusting in Jesus. We can never experience God's grace when we are proud, focused on our reputation or achievements. Now Naaman wants to pay for his healing, after declaring his new-found faith in God. But Elisha refuses payment.

5. Grace is free of charge. We cannot pay for our salvation. Naaman took home some soil to stand on whilst worshipping God in Aram. We too can only thank Him and worship Him for His free gift of salvation.

6. Heading home. Gehazi thought Elisha was foolish to refuse payment, so he decided to benefit from Naaman's generosity. But God reveals to Elisha his servant's betrayal. 'Is it a time to receive money?' he demands.

7. Grace demands grace. When God is merciful to a sinner, we must be very careful not to undermine God's free gift. We can become over-familiar with God's grace. We take it for granted. Gehazi wanted what Naaman had – and he got it. A Gentile sinner was healed and became a worshipper of God. The Israelite servant of God was punished with leprosy.

Elisha: Grace That Is An Eye-Opener – 2 Kings 6.8-23

1. What God sees in the Aramean strategy room. A traitor is betraying Aram's military secrets. The 'culprit' is God. God hears and sees everything. He knows every evil plan in the world today. God is never surprised or caught off guard.

2. What Elisha's servant sees. He recoils in fear at the sight of Aram's horses and chariots surrounding them. But Elisha prays that his eyes will be opened to see the host of the Lord's army. He sees a spiritual realm; a reality that humans rarely glimpse. The realm of God's presence is as real as our earthly problems. There were 72,000 angels on stand-by at Calvary in case God gave the order to save Jesus from the Cross. Remember Psalm 34:7

3. What the Aramean soldiers see. They are blinded after Elisha prays. They are desperate because they are lost. Elisha offers to lead them. He leads them to Israel's king in Samaria. When their sight is restored they expected to be killed. Christ still opens blind eyes to God's truth. (Continued on Page 16)

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Please Don't Cut Aid Further

AUSTRALIAN Christian Lobby urges Deputy PM Julie Bishop and Treasurer Joe Hockey to reject speculation aid is to be cut again in the forthcoming budget.

The ACL has expressed dismay at media speculation that further cuts will be made to Australia's overseas aid. Managing Director Lyle Shelton called on Julie Bishop to lobby Mr Hockey to leave aid alone in next week's budget, as she did back in March.

'Our aid has become a soft touch for budget cuts because poor people overseas don't vote and few in Australia care enough to raise their voices,' Mr Shelton said. 'Last year cuts to aid made up 20% of all cuts in the budget.'

'Australia has to live within its means but most of us have mortgages and are still able to find something in our household budgets to give to the poor. The nation should do the same,' Mr Shelton said.

'Our nation's bi-partisan Howard-era United Nations Millennium Development Goal promised to raise aid to 0.7% of Gross National Income. This aim is now in tatters.

'First, Labor in government deferred promised aid and then the Coalition cut almost \$8 billion over the next five years. Despite Ms Bishop's obvious ire in March when leaks emerged that aid was in the frame again, there has been little public reaction to the prospects of further cuts.'

Mr Shelton said that the United Kingdom, whose economy was in a worse condition when compared to Australia's, had already met the 0.7% GNI promise. Last year Ms Bishop said aid would be capped at \$5 billion which meant Australia's aid giving was no longer tied to GNI and able to rise as the nation's wealth rose.

Mr Shelton urged people to email Mr Hockey and urge him to leave aid alone in next week's budget.

SEEN ON FACEBOOK: 7 KEYS TO A HAPPY LIFE:

1. God first.
2. Love one another.
3. Never hate.
4. Give generously.
5. Live simply.
6. Forgive quickly.
7. Be kind always.

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Paul's View Of Ministry – Romans 15.14-33

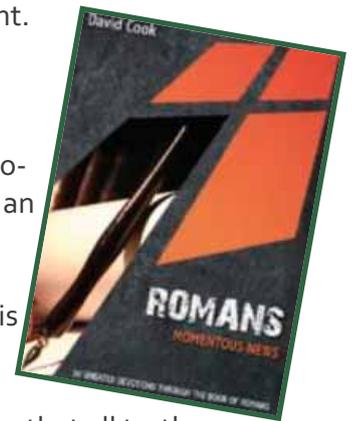
IT is not wrong to be ambitious. Ambition is like faith – it is neither wrong nor right. As in the case of faith, it all depends on what you are ambitious for. Ambition for money will make you greedy, ambition for pleasure will make you indulgent, ambition for recognition will make you self-promoting.

Paul uses the word ambition on three occasions: in 2 Corinthians 5.9, 1 Thessalonians 4.11 and here in Romans 15.20. This verse is a good reminder that Paul was an incidental theologian and that he was first and foremost a missionary church planter. This does not mean that he was theologically sloppy, the *Letter To The Romans* is testimony to his theological acumen. However, it does mean that all his thinking was to serve the enterprise of taking the Gospel where there was no existing church, 'where Christ was not known'.

Like Calvin who studied theology in order to be a better pastor, Paul makes sure that all truth and insight drives his missionary endeavours.

How Does Paul View His Ministry?

- First, all he is and does is based on God's grace (v15). He never forgot his days as a persecutor of the church.
- Second, he is a 'minister' of Jesus Christ (v16) – a word used to describe serious government service.
- Third, his ministry priority (v16) is to pass on to the Gentiles the Gospel from God in order that their lives might become an offering acceptable to God (see 2 Corinthians 11:8).
- Fourth, his ministry is self-effacing (v17) and it is a result of Christ's accomplishment (v18). Paul is not out



FOR REFLECTION:

What are you ambitious for today? Where are your ambitions leading you? How do your ambitions affect the Gospel and its ministry?

to build up a following for himself. His ministry is based on grace, focused on the Gospel and undertaken in a self-effacing manner.

Just as:

- you can't be fit without exercise;
 - you can't become wealthy by responding to emails from Nigeria;
 - you can't be slim without watching what you eat;
- so you can't grow a true church without the Gospel of grace being prominent. Paul is God's instrument to serve the Gospel to the Gentiles. Where will this lead him? From Jerusalem in the East to Illyricum in the North-West (v19).

Content taken from 'Romans: Transforming News' by David Cook, published by 10Publishing, used with permission.

'... LIVING STILL ...' – George Whitefield: Methodist Evangelist

'If there are any here who are strangers to this love of the Lord Jesus Christ, do not despair. Come, come unto Christ and He will have mercy upon you, He will pardon all your sins, He will heal all your backslidings, He will love you freely and take you to be with Himself.'

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BOOKS WORTH READING

LEVITICUS: AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY, Jay Sklar, TOTC 3; Nottingham: IVP, 2013. ISBN 978-1-84474-927-0.

ALMOST anyone reading the book of *Leviticus*, quickly recognises their need for assistance to understand and apply what is taught, and so here is a valuable new resource to meet this felt need. Jay Sklar is Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, St Louis Missouri. He asserts that *Leviticus* in fact reveals the meaning and purpose of life, as God comes to dwell among His people and teaches them how to live in His presence. In other words, despite the huge historical and cultural gap between the Israelites and our situation in the modern world, *Leviticus* informs us about the things that matter.

Dr Sklar links *Leviticus* to God's creation purposes as revealed in the Garden of Eden, and his biblical-theological approach is one of the strengths of his commentary. It is this framework that prevents *Leviticus* being merely a mass of arcane ritual information about the worship system of ancient Israel. It is pleasing to find that Sklar views Moses as the author and source of this book, while not discounting the possibility of some (inspired) editing at a later date.

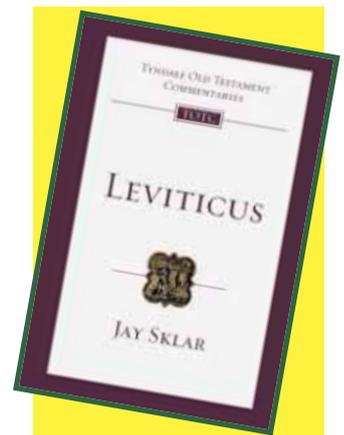
Professor Sklar is right to discern that the tabernacle is understood to be the palace of the Divine King, so that *Leviticus* is about loyalty to the Covenant King, and modern readers are to interpret and apply this book in terms of this fundamental Kingdom theology. I am not as convinced that Sklar's definition of 'holiness' (being set apart as distinctive in some way) is helpful or totally biblical, though the idea is common enough in popular Christian thinking, for in the Bible what is 'holy' is not so much separate *from* something as separate *to* God. Holiness is a positive relational concept. God is holy, and things or people closely related to God (eg priests, Levites, offerings) are therefore holy, so that holiness is really about loyalty to God and obedience to His commands.

The author helpfully explains the meaning behind the 'ritual states' of impurity (uncleanness), purity (cleanness) and holiness. Though these are not moral states as such, they are a constant reminder to the Israelites of God's holiness and their requirement to live holy lives. Despite coming from a different time, a different society and a different testament to the one we live in, Sklar shows the relevance of the laws of *Leviticus* as reflections of and windows into the unchanging character and values of God. God's character and values stay the same, though, of course, the practical implications may lead to very different behaviour in today's world.

Sklar tackles the thorny issue of the harsh (by our standards) penalties imposed on wrong behaviour in *Leviticus*, and has some helpful things to say on that topic, without impugning the truth and propriety of what Moses says on that subject. Sklar is also right to insist that the sacrifices prescribed in *Leviticus*, though they led to forgiveness, did not actually atone for sin, but (in the context of the Bible as a whole) point forward to the unique and sufficient sacrifice of Christ.

When Sklar comes to a paragraph-by-paragraph exposition of the 27 chapters that make up the book, his explanations are routinely clear, uncomplicated and brief. This is not one of those commentaries where one needs a commentary to understand what the great and learned theologian is saying! Why should I put my time and effort into reading and studying *Leviticus*? What this reviewer particularly appreciated was the Biblical Theology framework provided for the book as whole, which effectively answers the 'so what?' question.

– Greg Goswell



Sklar asserts that Leviticus in fact reveals the meaning and purpose of life, as God comes to dwell among His people and teaches them how to live in His presence. Despite the huge historical and cultural gap between the Israelites and our situation in the modern world, Leviticus informs us about the things that matter.

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'GRACE! GRACE! MARVELOUS GRACE!'

(Continued from page 12)

Elisha: Grace That Has To Be Shared – 2 Kings 6.24-7.20

Some things are better than you ever dreamed.

1. Some things are worse than you could ever imagine, such as the incredible price of donkeys' heads, dove dung and babies during the Aramean siege of Samaria. The standard wage was one shekel per month and a donkey's head, an unclean animal, was selling for 80 shekels. It was utterly distressing and wickedly awful to live when God had withdrawn His blessings. The judgment was worse than can be imagined, as it was when Jesus cried on the Cross, 'My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?' He took our punishment.

2. Better than you could dream of is Elisha's prophecy of the future, 7.1-2, but one of doom for the scornful official. Four lepers, v.3-6, have nothing to lose, so they walk down to the enemy camp, where they find all the food and riches left behind as the Arameans fled the scene. They had an amazing feast until they realized it was not good to keep it for themselves. A feast needs to be shared, v9. God keeps His word, the official was trampled to death, v. 17. The Gospel, like the enemy's provisions, is free; an unexpected and lavish form of grace. 'Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where he can find bread.' (DT Niles)

Elisha: Grace That Never Dies – 2 Kings 13.1-25

Some things are hard to kill such as terrorists, bad habits, memories, sinful ways. Good and beautiful things seem to die very easily. But God's plan is for all that is beautiful to be eternally secure, in Glory. Elisha's 50 years of ministry spanned four Israelite kings, with stories of grace the theme of his ministry.

1. A prophetic act. King Joash visits Elisha to honour him as he is dying. V.14 is a statement of fact. Elisha alone has been Israel's defence force.

2. A symbolic victory. Elisha instructs the king to strike the ground with an arrow, which Joash did only three times; half-heartedly. Thus Israel would only defeat Aram three times. Is your heart in it or not? Are we really passionate about destroying sin in our lives? Or are we indifferent to the consequences. Has an era of grace made any real difference? We are conditioned by society to be indifferent and mediocre.

John Wesley often prayed, 'Lord cure me of my intermittent poverty, and make me thoroughly Christian.'

3. A posthumous miracle. Elisha dies and is buried. Later a funeral party is startled by a band of raiding Moabites. They fling a man's body into the nearest cave which happens to be Elisha's grave. The body revives on contact with Elisha's bones!

– Barbie Prout (Mrs DP)

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