

Today's Quick Word 2 Kings 18:5-7

By Bruce Christian

2 KINGS 18:5-7 *Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no-one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.*

The statement, 'all the kings of Judah', does not include David but refers only to the rulers of the Southern Kingdom from Rehoboam up to the Babylonian captivity. All of these kings exhibited varying degrees of godliness, but the two that really stand out are Hezekiah and his great-grandson Josiah.

What makes Hezekiah especially noteworthy is that his father, Ahaz, and particularly his son, Manasseh, were probably the two worst kings of Judah! The sin that marked both of them out was that they blatantly encouraged the worship of the gods of Canaan and had absolutely no regard for the LORD's revealed truth in the Law of Moses. Like his ancestor David, Hezekiah did make some mistakes; he made some foolish decisions, about which the Prophet Isaiah had to rebuke him (eg 20:14-18).

But it is important for us to see that even these sins had a relevant role in the outworking of God's sovereign Plan of Salvation. (This fact in itself should encourage us not to become too disheartened, or to panic, when we see history seeming to

take a disastrous turn for the worse in our own day - I had no ulterior motive in writing this on Guy Fawkes Day or at a time when the results of the US elections are being determined!)

Nevertheless, King Hezekiah's trust in the LORD remained firm in spite of incredibly strong pressure and forceful temptation to follow prevailing human wisdom. When Sennacherib, King of Assyria, boasted of his own clearly proven supremacy among all the surrounding nations, encouraging Hezekiah to use his common sense and fall in with him (18:28-35), the faithful servant of the LORD did not waver, and God was with him.

It isn't always easy to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus today. The convincing claims of secular humanism are ever being thrust upon us through the media, and to remain true to the Scriptures can be very costly, and it requires courage, determination and trust.

Let us take heart from the example of Hezekiah: "And the LORD was WITH HIM; he was successful in whatever he undertook." And let us be much in prayer that this same Sovereign LORD will 'BE WITH' our brothers and sisters in Christ today who are losing significant influential positions, particularly in universities, because they have made a stand on Biblical truth in opposition to 'accepted political correctness', and/or who are being unjustly castigated in the media.

Today's Quick Word Hebrews 1:1-3

By Bruce Christian

HEBREWS 1:1-3 *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

The author of Hebrews wants to make sure his readers understand who the real Jesus is. They certainly knew ABOUT him as the historical figure who, within the lifetime of many of them, had grown up in Nazareth, exercised a significant teaching/healing ministry throughout the regions of Galilee and Judea, and was crucified as a common criminal in Jerusalem. All this was fairly commonly accepted recent history. And, increasingly, people were attaching themselves to his followers because of claims that he had risen from the dead and WAS NOW GOD'S RIGHTFUL KING - which, understandably, drew strong opposition from Jewish and Roman authorities alike.

In the face of such opposition, the persecution that came with it, and the consequent pressure to give up following him, it was important to be GRIPPED and IMPASSIONED by the full picture. This is what Hebrews is about; and these first three sentences set the scene.

Our God, the Creator of all that exists, is a personal God who wants us to know him in a personal way. Up to this point he had revealed himself, not only in the Creation itself, but through the inspired writings of his prophets - the Hebrew Scriptures.

But now, he has COME AMONGST US in history in the person of his Son. The real Jesus, who walked and talked on earth, is GOD THE CREATOR. When we see Jesus, we are seeing an exact representation of God. Not only was everything made BY him, everything was also made FOR him. Jesus of Nazareth is the reason for Creation, the reason that anything exists at all; and it is only because of him and through his powerful word that everything continues to hold together.

The substitutionary, sacrificial death of Jesus in history is the only means God has provided for our sins to be forgiven. Jesus now rules with the Father in heaven. All this makes a big difference to what it means to follow him. If this is true, any amount of opposition and persecution cannot deflect us from remaining faithful to him. Christianity is not just 'another religion', because Jesus is not just 'another religious philosopher/leader' - he is the embodiment of God's truth. (cf Jesus' own awe-inspiring claim in John 14:6 - "I AM the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through ME.")

Is it time for us all to have a reality check about our relationship with Jesus and who he IS?

Today's Quick Word Joel 1:2-3

By Bruce Christian

JOEL 1:2-3 *Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this [a devastating locust plague] ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.*

The instruction to make sure that all the generations of descendants who follow us are kept informed about the Lord's ongoing absolute sovereign rule over his Creation is usually given in the context of his power to SAVE. For Israel, this meant that they must never forget the Exodus from Egypt and the LORD's gracious, miraculous provision for 40 years in the Wilderness, followed by the conquest of Canaan. For instance, the compulsory annual Passover Meal was such a reminder, and, as part of its celebration, the children were to ask their parents what it all meant (Exodus 13:14). Similarly, Psalm 78:4 instructs us: "What we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us, we will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done."

But it is also good for us in these days, when the world is in such distress, medically, economically and politically, to take heed to what the Prophet Joel was told to declare to God's people nearly three millennia ago. They were to ensure that their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so on, understood that even something as disastrous as the locust plagues that had been wreaking havoc throughout the land, were part of the outworking of God's sovereign purposes for a world that was

under his righteous Judgement! The appropriate response is therefore repentance and trust in anticipation of the Coming of the Day of the Lord, as Joel points out in the remainder of his prophecy. He wrote: "The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls." (Joel 2:31-32)

Within a thousand years of this prophecy, the Apostle Peter would remind all those who witnessed the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, that such outpouring was a kind of 'first instalment' of what Joel was prophesying about the 'Last Days'.

In the light of all this, surely is it not OUR duty today to make it clear to our children and grandchildren that current events are ALL in God's powerful hands, and are intended as a gracious warning about what will happen when Jesus Returns on the Final 'Day of the Lord' because the sinful world is still under his righteous Judgement? And we can then share with them the 'Good News' that Peter shared with the people at Pentecost when they asked "Brothers, what shall we do?" and "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call.'" (Acts 2:37b-39).