

# Spiritual Blessings



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*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3*

## Dispensational Basics

### Who’s The “You”?

By Karl Edwards, Melbourne

When I was a child, if I spoke out of turn, my mother would sternly rebuke me by saying, “I wasn’t speaking to you”. At this, I would close my mouth and back away quickly for fear of what might come next. I think there is a lesson there for us all if we try to take all of the promises from God’s Word to ourselves, whether they belong to us or not. It might be a wise question to ask, “Is God actually speaking to me here?” Or more specifically, “Am I the “you” in this section of Scripture?”

I was at a church meeting once where the speaker read these well known verses from **Jer. 29:11–14a**:

*“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity...”*

She told us that God had a future and a hope for each of us, that He would listen to us whenever we prayed, that He would be found by us when we searched and, most of all, He would bring us out of our captivity. She then mentioned all kinds of captivity that we would be delivered from. To emphasise her point, she told the listeners to substitute the ‘you’ in these verses with their own names. She then read excitedly, “I know the thoughts that I think toward Michelle, says the LORD... to give Mark a future and a hope”. She continued to read, adding names of people who were present. The congregation also became excited by the prospects of these promises, agreeing that this was a wonderful way to realise the promises of God for themselves, and

it seemed from the reception that no one thought to ask, “Are these verses really talking about me?” Even though these verses contain some universal truths concerning the nature of God, is it right to appropriate any section of Scripture to anyone who reads it? Can we always assume that “you” means me?

#### Context!

This question could be answered in part by reading a little more around the verses quoted. For instance, the speaker had not read verse 10 or the whole of verse 14, which say:

*“For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.” (v. 10).*

*“... I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.” (v. 14 b).*

These verses immediately tells us the Lord is talking to a group of people who are at Babylon because He allowed them to be taken captive by the Babylonians. They are the “you” of

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## President's Word

Greetings once again to all of our readers.

We would like to wish you a Happy New Year, though most of us know that the year has not begun too happily for some in our region. Overseas readers may not be aware that, in recent months, a great many Australians have been adversely affected by bushfires, unprecedented flooding and a particularly fierce cyclone. The immediate danger has subsided in most cases, but the after-effects will be felt for quite some time. The Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia extends its deepest sympathy to any readers who may have suffered loss or been touched by these devastating events.

We may be tempted to ask, "How could a loving God allow such things to happen?". The question is a reasonable one, but let us not forget that it was the same God - the same loving God - who "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Suffering, loss, pain, even death and the "unfairness" of life on a planet tainted by sin's touch, are all experiences that our Father and His Son know and can relate to much better than we may at first want to acknowledge. It is easy to think that God has no real understanding of man in such situations. However, we should remember that we ourselves have been "purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28) - innocent blood that was shed in the most unjust and undeserved of circumstances.

For a Biblical perspective on this important issue, I would recommend that you read the booklet "Natural Disasters" advertised on page 11. In it is a consideration of similarly awful events in Scripture, and a demonstration of how we can make some sense of these things and still confidently trust and take refuge in our God.

### Special Events

On a brighter note, it is my pleasure to announce that two days of meetings in Tasmania on the weekend of March 19th & 20th have just been finalised. The venue is the Penguin Senior Citizens

Club (1 Crescent St., Penguin, near Burnie). The programme starts at 1.30 pm on each day and will finish around 8.00 pm on the Saturday, and around 5.30 pm on the Sunday, with breaks for refreshments. Speakers will be Karl Edwards and myself, and we would especially invite any folks living in or planning to visit Tasmania to drop in for those days.

We are also planning a day of Bible Study and Fellowship in May in the Newcastle or Maitland area, and a weekend in the Brisbane area around the middle of the year. I must apologise for not having more specific details available yet, but these shall be finalised by the time of the next issue. Alternatively, drop into our web site periodically and we will post the details there as soon as we are able. The address - [www.spiritualblessings.org](http://www.spiritualblessings.org) (click on "Special Meetings").

### Annual Conference

This year's annual conference will be held at Bethshan in Wyee (near Morisset on the NSW Central Coast) on September 24th, 25th and 26th, 2011. Registration forms will be sent out later in the year, but we invite you to set aside those days for a weekend of Bible study and fellowship. We encourage you to mark these dates in your diary.

### Optional Subscription

You will notice that this issue has been sent out with an "Optional Subscription" form. We gladly send our magazine FREE OF CHARGE to anyone who asks for it, which is why subscription is "optional". If you can't afford the "optional subscription", don't worry, you will still receive our magazine if you have requested it. This is just our way of providing you with an opportunity to help us should you wish to do so, as the BBFA has no paid pastors or staff, and is run on a purely voluntary basis. Thanks to everyone who has returned this form to us in previous years. If you feel that what we do is worthwhile, and you would like to help us cover some of the costs of printing, posting and administration, we invite you to return that form with a payment, or simply visit our website at [www.spiritualblessings.org/donate](http://www.spiritualblessings.org/donate) to make a donation online.

### More Special Events

This column cannot be signed off without mentioning some special events in the lives of some

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these verses. We also know from Kings and Chronicles that the Kingdom of Judah was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar because of their idolatry, and from the context of Jeremiah, they are the people to whom the Lord was speaking, not anyone living today. In fact, it was when Daniel read these very Scriptures later at Babylon that he realised that the seventy years of captivity were nearly ended. (Dan. 9:2.)

The question of who the “you” is in Jer. 29, is further established by simply going back to v. 4: **“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all ... whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon ...”**.

Not only does this verse tell us exactly who is the focus of verses 11 to 14, but any part of the book of Jeremiah, beyond a few selected verses, will clearly illustrate that the Lord is talking to, and dealing with, Israel. It is probably correct to say that no other group of people in the world’s history have the right to claim these specific promises, and a Christian claiming promises to Israel in the book of Jeremiah today may well get the same answer from the Lord as I sometimes received from my mother – “I’m not talking to you.”

### There Are Consequences

While the idea of understanding who a particular passage is written to would seem to be a relatively simple matter, the reality is that many who read the Bible see themselves in every part of the book and as the focus of every promise. Some may ask, “Well, what’s the problem? Is it not all God’s Word? Isn’t all God’s Word profitable? Why can’t I read and believe what I want?” However, people who respond like this, do not live their ordinary lives by that rule. For instance, when booking a flight, they know that not all flights will take them where they want to go, so they book selectively. When filing a tax return, they are careful to fill in only the sections which apply to them, otherwise they may have to pay taxes for which they are not liable. There are numerous examples in everyday life where we understand that only certain things apply to us, and ignoring that truth might bring unwanted consequences. The same logic should be

used when reading the Scriptures, for misappropriating promises can often result in, at best, confusion or inconvenience and, at worst, tragedy.

For instance, those who are interested in Christ’s second coming often interpret world events using Scriptures, which, in their proper context, concern only Israel. This is one reason why some Christians are confused. By similar misapplication, some inconvenience themselves and others by trying to keep the Sabbath and other parts of the Mosaic Law, which again was given only to Israel.

As mentioned, misapplied promises cause much confusion, but nothing is more tragic than a case in the UK in 2009, when a husband and wife let their 11 year old diabetic daughter die because they believed that God would heal her through prayer. In the subsequent trial, the father stated his belief that God

*Many problems in the Scriptures disappear when we identify the recipient’s of particular promises.*

would heal his daughter and that he never expected her to die. He said, “If I go to the doctor, I am putting the doctor before God; I am not believing what He said He would do.”

The girl died on the floor of their home surrounded by people who also believed that God would heal her. This, unfortunately, is not an isolated case. Claiming promises from the Gospels such as those in Mark 16:15-18, believing that they are instructions for Christians today, is one of the main reasons why such tragedies take place.

### Who Is The “You” In Mark 16:15–18?

A cursory reading of those last verses of Mark may seem to say that healing should be available to believers today. After all, Christ healed continuously and enabled his disciples to do the same, so these words seem to be a promise of power and healing to all who believe. If one believes, signs should follow! However, 2000 years of Christianity show that this is not the case, a fact which confuses many believers. Some say it is because the sick ones don’t have enough faith. Others say that God has only given the power to certain people, while yet others believe that these signs are happening regularly in places like Africa and China. Regardless of what people believe, however, it is evident that now, there are virtually no evidential signs or miracles following those who believe.

The problem of Mark 16:14-18, like other problems in Scripture, disappears when the correct recipient is identified. In other words, if these promises were never directed toward Christians today in the first place, there is no need for confusion or such tragedies as the one mentioned above. So the question arises as to whom exactly the Lord gave this directive. Are those words spoken to you?

## God's Unconditional Covenants

To answer these questions, it will help to consider the unconditional covenants God made in the Old Testament, with whom He made them, and what relevance, if any, they have for us today. There are three specific, unconditional covenants mentioned, one with Noah concerning the earth, one with Abraham concerning the land and one with David concerning the throne. Being unconditional, these covenants are unbreakable because God is the only contracting party. Wherever a man is involved in any covenant, it is always broken. Hence, God made a promise with Himself, so to speak, which means that God's unconditional covenants will hold true.

The covenant made with Noah was not for Noah's benefit only, but for all of his descendants and every living creature that was with him on the earth.

**Gen. 9:8-10.** *"Then God spoke to Noah ... saying 'And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that is with you ...'"*

In Genesis 8:21, God declares that He will not curse the ground again nor destroy every living thing, and that as long as the earth lasted, it would continue to function as previously, with day and night and the seasons providing consistency for agriculture and the continuance of life. He then tells Noah to be fruitful and multiply, after which He makes a formal covenant. Because all of mankind are Noah's descendants, this covenant does include you and me.

Abraham's covenant, however, was for his descendants only. God told him, in Gen. 15:7, that He would give him the land later known as Israel. Abraham asked how he could know that he would inherit it, and there follows a very unusual procedure.

**Gen. 15:9, 10.** *"So He [God] said to him, 'Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' Then he brought all these to Him and cut*

*them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two."*

Strange as it may seem to us, this was the normal method of making a covenant at that time. The cutting of the animals was a sacrifice representing the agreement made between the two parties; in fact the Hebrew words for "make a covenant", *karath berith*, literally mean "to cut a covenant". The animals were laid out and the contracting parties then walked between the carcass pieces, signifying that if either party broke the agreement, they would end up like the animals. However, when it came time for Abraham to walk between the animals, he was put into a deep sleep, and God, symbolised by the smoking oven and burning torch, made the covenant alone. (Gen. 15:12; 17, 18). The unconditional nature of this covenant could not be more vivid.

The land was specifically covenanted to Abraham and his descendants, not to all mankind. The promise is reiterated to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-6), eliminating Ishmael and then to Jacob and his 12 sons (Gen 28:14, 15), eliminating Esau. So, unless you are of the lineage of Jacob, this covenant does not include you.

The third unconditional covenant was made with David, a direct descendant and therefore, also, a recipient of the covenant made with Abraham.

**1 Chron. 17:11-14.** *"And it shall be, when your days are fulfilled, ... that I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. ... and I will not take My mercy away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. ... and his throne shall be established forever."*

While this prophecy involves Solomon, it ultimately refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. David was of the tribe of Judah, and Christ came from that same lineage, being of the seed of David.

It is interesting to note that there are a number of places in the Scriptures where these covenants are connected.

**Jer. 33:20, 21.** *"Thus says the LORD: 'If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne...'"*

***Psalms 89:35 – 37. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky.”***

God declares that His covenant with David concerning the throne is as sure as His covenant with day and night and the sun and the moon. The kingdom and the royal line of David will be established finally in the millennial kingdom with the Lord Jesus Christ as King. It is the unconditional nature of these covenants, and an understanding of the people they concern, that provides the key to understanding the “you” of Mark chapter 16.

### **The Role Of The Holy Spirit**

Ezekiel, writing of the future time when God will restore Israel to the promised land in preparation for the kingdom, highlights the pouring out of the spirit that will take place.

***Ezek. 36:24-28. “For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you ...I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; ... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then ... you shall be My people, and I will be your God.”***

The Spirit within them will enable them to keep the law, something they were never able to do under the conditional Mosaic covenant. The Lord had said to them through Moses (Exod. 19:5, 6),

***“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be mine own possession from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation...”***

There was an “if” then and they failed to keep the statutes, but after the Spirit is poured out on them, they shall have a new “heart” and new spirit and they will be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, dwelling in the land God gave to their fathers. Isaiah also speaks about this time in Isa 44:3-5. If there is any doubt as to whose descendants verse three refers to, verse one clearly tells us that it is the nation of Israel. Joel 2:28, 29 also describes signs that will be evident in Israel when the Spirit is poured out on them.

***“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream***

***dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”***

Joel’s prophecy is clearly written to Israel, the pouring out of the Spirit is for them at the time when the everlasting kingdom will be established, and to put today’s Christians into these verses makes no sense in the context of all of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The word “your” in these verses is clearly not about you or me.

### **Christ, A Minister To The Circumcision**

It surprises many people when they learn that Christ’s earthly ministry was focused solely on Israel.

***Rom. 15:8. “Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers.”***

The Lord preached repentance in preparation for the kingdom to Israel only, and healed them to prepare them for their role as a kingdom of priests and the channel of blessing to the rest of the nations. Thousands of people were healed; instantaneous, evidential miracles were taking place on a daily basis. Not only did He heal, but He gave His disciples, all Israelites, the power to heal also. They healed only other Israelites, the people of the covenants. In fact, there are only two incidents in the Gospels where the Lord healed non-Jews – the Roman centurion’s servant in Luke 7 and the Canaanite woman in Matt 15, where the Lord described the healing as “the children’s bread”. He meant that healings were only for those who were members of the kingdom of priests, and a blemished priest could not carry out the priestly duties (Lev. 21:21).

When He sent out the disciples, we can clearly see that Israel was the Lord’s primary concern.

***Matt. 10:5- 8. “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”***

At this point, it was for Jews only. Although these signs were unprecedented, they were not unexpected. The Old Testament prophesied these things of the Messiah, and those who knew the Scriptures expected the Messiah to do such things.

When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent two disciples to ask the Lord if He was the Christ (Luke 7:18-22). John was the forerunner, and perhaps he was a little anxious because he might have expected by now to be in the King's kingdom, not in a king's dungeon. The Lord answered John by referring to His signs and miracles such as *"the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them"*. (cf. Isa. 35 and 61) The signs were enough for John to recognise that Jesus was indeed the King. and the Messiah, the One who had come to save them. The signs also fulfilled the promises made to the descendants of Jacob, and the signs, during Acts, authenticated the disciples as they continued the witness to Israel that the Lord had begun. This is what is being spoken of in **Heb. 2:3, 4.**

***"... which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"***

Acts two records the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and despite the traditional view, the Spirit was poured out only on the Children of Israel. There were no Gentiles there, only those of the lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, only those to whom the covenants and the oracles of God had been committed. (Rom 3:1,2).

When Peter spoke to the crowd in Acts 2 & 3, he addressed them specifically as:

***"... men of Judea", 2:14; "... men of Israel", 2:22 & 3:12; "... the God of our fathers", 3:13; ... brethren" 3:17; "... You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers..." , 3:25.***

Who is the "you" of these verses? Not you or me. Peter also tells them that, if they repent, they will receive the promised restoration of the kingdom (Acts 3:19-21), the same message that was preached in

the Gospels by John the Baptist, the Lord, and the disciples. This offer of the kingdom in the Gospels was rejected by Israel as a nation, but here in Acts, it is offered a second time with the same condition of repentance. As in the Gospels, so the offer in Acts was also with evidential signs and miracles, carried out by the "those who believed", as in Mark 16. The last verse of Mark 16 is a beautiful summary of the book of Acts.

***Mark 16:20. "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen."***

While the Jews expected such signs from God, the Gentiles had no idea what they meant. There are two records in the book of Acts where Gentiles saw signs of healing and miracles, and in both cases, they quickly turned to idolatry. (See Acts 14:11–13 and 28:3–6).

Gentiles still do not understand those signs. The plethora of so-called signs and miracles in modern Christendom do nothing more than lead people into the same idolatrous practices of worshipping the performers. When we understand that the signs and the miracles of the

*While the Jews expected signs from God, Gentiles had no idea what such signs meant!*

Gospels and the Acts were for the sole purpose of authenticating Christ as the Messiah to Israel, then we understand the **significance** of the **signs**, and when we read "you" in relation to demonstrations of God's power throughout the Scriptures, we realise that the "you" are those to whom God promised such power.

There are many wonderful promises written directly to Christians today, but as long as we try to claim promises in which God is not speaking to us, we will wander in confusion and disappointment. So, when reading the Scriptures, simply ask yourself, "Am I the "you" being addressed", and check the context, because the name and address of the recipient is usually clearly marked on the envelope. ☩

***"DISTINGUISH AS TO TIMES, AND THE SCRIPTURES WILL HARMONIZE."***  
*St. Augustine.*

## **President's Word. Cont. from p.2.**

of the BBFA's good friends and supporters. We'd like to extend our congratulations to Phil and Trichelle Cox in NSW upon the arrival of Thomas William (whose four older sisters are very excited!) Congratulations are also in order for Ron and Edith Hodge who were wed recently in Queensland, and are now living in NSW. We wish each of you the best, and may these marvellous events give us all cause to lift up the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Until next time, may the Lord be glorified by our witness, our walk, and our study of His Word.

*David Tavender.*

## **Editorial**

I want to add some comments to what David has said in his President's Word about the natural calamities that have affected many different people. Widely separated areas of our country have taken a battering, and while Australians have been battling floods, cyclones and bushfires, many parts of the northern hemisphere have experienced heavy snowstorms and freezing temperatures. Cyclone Yaris, that roared in from the Pacific Ocean across the Queensland northern coast, cut a swathe of destruction right through to Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. The destruction of property has been extensive from all these causes, and lives were lost.

Here in NSW, we suffered a heatwave lasting six days in early February, with temperatures over 35 deg. each day, and highs of 40 degrees plus several times.

I know that some Bible students will see these weather extremes as signs leading up to the end times as outlined by the Lord in Matt. 24. I disagree on that point, but I do think there is an important lesson that the world should learn as these natural forces reduce those who suffer them to helpless, trembling heaps.

Remember the volcano in Iceland last year? It stopped world air travel in its tracks, and in spite of all our vaunted technological achievements, we were powerless. Does it not show that when God does unleash the forces of nature on the world in the days preceding the Lord's return, humanity will have no

answer? Would it not be a wise move to take out the only insurance available — and the only insurance necessary — and make sure you are on the winning side while the opportunity is still available? Just in case any reader is not sure what I refer to, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!"

### **In This Issue**

Our lead article is a dispensational study by Karl Edwards of Melbourne. I hope you will give it serious attention as Karl makes a very important point in the matter of understanding the Bible. He gave this study at our annual conference in 2009, and I'm only sorry that the words on the page cannot produce Karl's delightful Irish brogue for you. You must come to our conference to experience that pleasure! Also, congratulations are due to Carl and his wife Nadreh who recently became Australian citizens. Good on ya, mates!

The other major article is a reprint from The Berean Expositor of an article by Charles Welch. He looks at a number of 'openings' that are essential to effective service for our Master. My hope is that it will cause you to examine your own spiritual condition as it did me. May we always be as responsive to the voice of the Lord as the child Samuel was.

My thanks to several readers who have once again expressed their appreciation of various articles, or, as in the case of one reader, challenged the thoughts expressed. I would have liked to print the letter, but permission was not granted. The letter was answered personally however. Let me say very clearly that, in the BBFA, we are quite happy to be challenged about our understanding of God's Word. Discussion between believers, when carried out in a Christ-like spirit, can only be helpful and productive. I have a Brother in the Lord who challenges me on a fairly regular basis, and I am acutely aware that this has improved my understanding of God's Word and also made me a better person.

As Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."

I pray that the contents of this issue shall be received by 'opened ears', and contribute to our growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord.

*Athol Walter.*

# EPHPHATHA

Or, “Be Opened.”

(By the late Chas. Welch, from *The Berean Expositor*, Vol. 31.)

(Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version.)

A common expression, belonging to no one aspect of service, is that of an ‘opening’ being found for a person who has sought employment. The word is used in several suggestive ways in connection with the greatest of all service, the service of the Lord. It may be a word in season to some readers if we give the usage of this word a consideration.

The first question to present itself concerns the order in which we should deal with the many ‘openings’ that are discovered. Of what use is an ‘open door’ if our mouths are closed? Or what use is an ‘open mouth’ if we have nothing to say? Consequently, before we think of the openings for service that await the believer, we must pay attention to the messenger himself. The first part of our study therefore is associated with –

## THE OPENED EAR.

A twofold charge is brought against the ‘Hebrews’ in ch. 5 of that Epistle – “they were dull of hearing” and “they ought to have been teachers.” This suggests that the opened ear is a very important factor in the equipment of a teacher. The Apostle makes it very plain, when speaking of the gospel which he preached, that he was but passing on a message that he had himself received:– “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received” (1 Cor. 15:3), and whatever way the Lord chose to reveal the truth to His servant, the figure of the opened ear is suggestive.

The greatest Servant of all, wonderful to say, is the Lord Himself, and it is in the prophetic record written by Isaiah long before the first advent, that we find our perfect illustration:–

*“The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.*

*The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I*

*turn away.” (Isa. 50:4,5.)*

What a full passage is this! First of all, we observe that the ‘tongue’ is intimately associated with the ‘ear’. It is a physical truth that many are dumb simply because they are deaf. The Lord once had a man brought before Him who was deaf and who had an impediment in his speech.

*“And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched His tongue. Then looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened’. Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. (Mark 7:33-35.)*

In this miracle we may see a picture of the believer who, because he has not ‘the hearing ear’, has an impediment also in his speech. The Lord said, “Be opened”; He had no need to utter the words “Be loosed”, for with the opening of the ear, the tongue was loosed, and “he spoke plainly”.

The expression ‘the tongue of the learned’ is a trifle misleading. ‘Learned’ conjures up before the mind great scholarship, venerable age, and all the accompaniments of ‘learning’. The word before us would be better translated ‘learner’ or ‘disciple’, one who is a willing follower, rather than one who has attained great scholarship.

This gift conveys to the possessor that priceless ability “to know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary”. When we remember the Lord, His graciousness, His patience and longsuffering, and withal His pity and His love, and when we compare that with our own sharpness, our own lack of tact, our abruptness, we may perhaps be led to acknowledge how much we need the opened ear, so that we may have a tongue that shall speak in season.

“Lord speak to me, that I may speak,  
In living echoes of Thy tone”

is a prayer we may all pray with profit, and with assurance of blessing when the answer is given.

The ear in Isa. 50, is said to be both 'wakened' and 'opened'. The waking is 'morning by morning', and is suggestive of continual communion with the Lord. The idea conveyed by the word 'open' is clearly perceived when we remember that it gives us the word "key" in Isa. 22:22, quoted earlier. The added clause, "and I was not rebellious", is really an expansion of the idea already presented by the wakened and opened ear. To hear, and especially to hearken, in the Scriptures, often meant to obey.

***"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams". (1 Sam. 15:22.)***

***"But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear." (Zech. 7:11.)***

Here then is one of the foremost 'openings' in Christian service, the opening of the ear, so that the message given may be received, and from the close association of hearkening with obeying, there may be some correspondence between doctrine and practice on the part of those who seek to serve their God.

### **The Open Book: "To Equip."**

The opened ear, however, is but one side of the truth; there must be another, namely, something for the ear to hear. However eager we may be to learn, or however ready to hear, there must be someone who speaks and something to be taught. As we saw, the opened ear demands a voice that speaks. Yet, the majority of those who have been equipped for God's service, have been prepared by the written Word, and they would hesitate seriously before they yielded submission to any spoken voice.

It is evident that the words, "Who has ears to hear, let him hear", have a wider application than to those who were within the sound of the Lord's voice. "He that hears My word, and believes on Him who sent Me, has everlasting life" (John 5:24) is most certainly not limited to the hearing of a voice. We need not labour the point, for all will agree that the figure of the ear is not to be limited to the act of hearing, but stands for ready perception, whatever channel the message comes through. Today we are guided neither by vision, dreams, voices nor angels. We are guided by the written Word, and as we read its pages and obey its teaching, we are "hearing" in the

truest sense. Consequently, we must now consider "The Opened Book".

Readers who are acquainted at all with the writings of Dr. E. W. Bullinger will remember that a favourite expression of his, when involved in any argument concerning the faith, was one borrowed from Nehemiah 8:5, "Open the Book". Over and over again, when debate has run high, we have seen strong feeling quieten and sweet reasonableness follow the opening of the Book. Another passage much used by Dr. Bullinger was that of Romans 10:17:

***"... faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."***

There are several ways in which we might think of the Scripture as an open book. Firstly, it is an open book because it has been freely given to all the people of God. We rejoice that the reading of the Bible is the exclusive privilege of no class or person. Secondly, it is an open book because it speaks frankly. There are depths and heights in its teaching that baffle the holiest and the wisest. There are mysteries and parables, prophecies and visions, that

leave the mind impressed with the fact that its author is none less than "the only wise God". Yet granting all this, how plainly, how simply, how openly it speaks of sin, salvation, the Saviour, life, death and judgment.

*A favourite saying of Dr. Bullinger's was:  
"Open the Book!"*

While a number of features, like the two already given, could be brought forward to underline the fact that the book is indeed open, there is, nevertheless, another aspect of the Scriptures wherein these self-same Scriptures need to be opened. Think of Luke's closing chapter, where the disciples were led to exclaim:

***"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" Luke 24:32).***

If we enquire as to the way in which the Lord opened the Scriptures with such enriching consequences, we have not far to seek. We find His method in v. 27 of the same chapter:

***"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself."***

The subject is of such importance that we find it repeated in v. 44:

***“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”***

We find other Spirit-led servants of the Lord following these steps. Philip found the Ethiopian eunuch reading a part of Isaiah 53, and the eunuch asked him the question:

***“I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” (Acts 8:34).***

Philip began at the same Scripture and preached Jesus to him. Paul, on more than one occasion, is found opening the book in this same way.

***“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’” (Acts 17:2, 3).***

It is not our object to write at length on these themes, but rather to stimulate the interest of the reader, in the hope that the riches of the Book may be sought and found individually.

We might, perhaps, draw attention to the fact that an opened book is seen at the time of the end. When the time comes for the Lord to take the Kingdom and reign, He alone is found worthy “to open the book” (Rev. 5), and when the millennial Kingdom has run its course and the great white throne is set, even then the destiny of man is still involved in the opening of books.

***“... Then the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” (Rev. 20:12).***

Returning to our theme, the opened ear is first of all necessary so that we may learn, but the opened book is likewise necessary if the truth is to be made known to us. The equipment of the child of God for service that the Word of God accomplishes, is so complete, that the word “perfect”, used in 2 Tim. 3:17

is one used in connection with the fitting out of a ship. We need therefore:

- 1) The opened ear – to learn.
- 2) The opened book – to equip.

### **The Opened Understanding: “To Perceive”**

While the opened ear and the opened Book constitute an important part of the equipment of the believer for service, there is yet another need, that of the opened understanding.

***“And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people ... So they read distinctly in from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.” (Nehemiah 8:5-8).***

The physical opening of the Book was followed by its ‘opening’ in a fuller sense, and it will help us if we observe what Ezra and the assembled company did on that occasion.

***“When he opened it, all the people stood up... And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” (Neh. 8:5, 6).***

The opening of the Book was the signal for the worship of its Author. We reverence the Word

of God because we reverence the God of the Word.

We are also told that ‘they read distinctly from the Book ...’ If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, said the Apostle Paul, who shall prepare himself for battle? Writing later to Timothy, he said, “Till I come, give attention to reading ...”(1 Tim. 4:13). To the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:30).

In the Revised Version margin of Nehemiah 8:8, the word ‘distinctly’ is translated ‘with an interpretation’. The word thus translated is “parash” and means to unfold, spread out or extend, and has the same meaning as our word ‘exposition’. A person who is able merely to spell out the Hebrew letters P, A, R, A, S, H, does not ‘understand’ Nehemiah 8:8. Understanding has to do with meaning, and unless we arrive at the meaning of a passage or a word of Scripture, it will remain a dead

*“...yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.”*  
1 Cor. 15:19

letter to us. It is therefore a distinct ministry to 'spread out' the meaning of God's Word. It may take the form of analysis or it may take the form adopted by Philip when he "preached Jesus', but in every case, "to understand" involves getting beneath the surface to essentials, or, as Nehemiah 8:8 adds, "they gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading."

Earlier we referred to Luke 24 for the "opening of the Scriptures", and to that passage we must again refer for the added "opening of the understanding".

***"And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead the third day ...' (Luke 24:45, 46).***

The Lord was evidently concerned that His words should be understood. On more than one occasion He said to His disciples, "Have you understood all these things?" (Matt. 13:51). In Mark 12:28-34, the Lord commended a scribe who said that the right way to love God was "with all the heart, with all the understanding ..."(33).

The Apostle Paul followed his Lord in this particular, saying, "I will pray with the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15); "... I would rather speak five words with my understanding ..." (1 Cor. 14:19).

We may well conclude this article with the Apostle's words to Timothy, "... may the Lord give you understanding in all things." (2 Tim. 2:7).

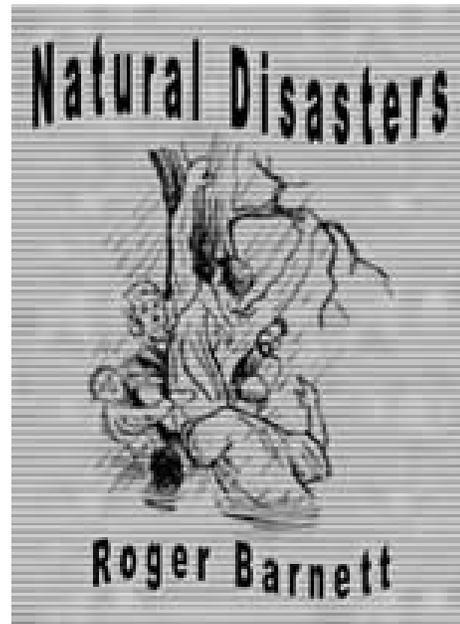
To sum up what we have learned, therefore, we need:-

- 1) The opened EAR – to learn.
- 2) The opened BOOK – to equip.
- 3) The opened UNDERSTANDING – to perceive. ☚

**Christianity is a system of beliefs that is embedded in fact and is an integrated whole in which each part must contribute and be in harmony with the rest.**

**There is no room for illogic. It must be a rigid structure, logically defensible once believed, though not believed merely because it is logically defensible.**

**From "The Virgin Birth" by Arthur C. Custance.**



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*"Anselm said, "I believe in order that I may understand." Years later, Abelard said, "I seek understanding in order that I may believe." Abelard was wrong. Faith precedes understanding.*

*When a head and a book come into collision, and one sounds hollow, is it always the book?  
Schopenhauer.*

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