Articles by Henry Fletcher

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Opportune Succour (Nov 1955)

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The reading of the first book of Samuel provides a real stimulus to prayer. It opens with a domestic scene, the home of a godly Levite (1 Chron. 6:33-34). In contrast to other Ephrathites of whom we read in the preceding book of Ruth, Elkanah did not leave his home-land in the time of stress. Instead, he dwelt with his family at Ramathaim-zophim, which means, the high place of the watchers. Like Habakkuk, he could say, “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me,” (Hab. 2:1).

Elkanah went yearly to worship at the temple, because God had instructed His people so to do (Deut. 12:4-7). Of course he might have excused himself and his family from going to Shiloh, but he was obedient to the Word of God. The Bible, likewise, governs our conduct by stating, “Not forsaking the assembling (or gathering) of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching,” (Heb. 10:25). “For where two or three are gathered (same word as in Heb. 10:25) together in My name, there am I in the midst of them,” (Matt. 18:20). There are many other lessons we could learn from Elkanah, but let us go on to consider Hannah.

It never has been the will of God that man should have more than one wife. In the beginning God gave only one, Eve, to Adam. The descendants of Cain, of whom we read in Genesis, were the first to ignore this original intention of the Lord. Whenever in Scripture a plurality

of wives is mentioned, there is also the record of the resulting envy, strife, and bitterness. This is evident in the cases of Hagar, Leah, and others. The home of Elkanah was not an exemption from this rule, for these forms of evil are seen in the provocations of Penninah.

Hannah was much tried and afflicted, yet we do not read of her retaliating; instead, she found relief in prayer to God, her only unfailing source of comfort and strength: “Earth hath no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.” She had no rest at home, and even in Shiloh, where things should have been different, she was misjudged. With her cup of sorrow full, she poured out her heart in supplication, and was able to leave her burden with the Lord. She dried her tears and was then no more sad, for she proved the truth of Isa. 26:3, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee.” She could have sung, as we do in this day:

“I leave it all with Jesus

Day by day,

Faith can firmly trust Him,

Come what may;

She has dropped her anchor,

Found her rest

In the calm, sure haven

Of His breast.”

Thank God, we have a blessed refuge where always we find sure protection, and where we may cast on Him our every care. “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you,” (1 Peter 5:7).

God rewarded Hannah's faith by giving her a son, and what a son! The Lord did for her exceeding abundantly above all that she could have asked or thought. How she would love and cherish her own child, Samuel! Finally the time came when she must keep her vow, and give him back to God. What a heart-wrench! Yet in the energy of her faith she did it. The next chapter in the Book of Samuel, records her prayer, or, rather, her song. She experienced God's love to her in a special way, for "God loveth a cheerful giver," (2 Cor. 9:7). David once said, "I will not offer burnt offerings without cost," (1 Chron. 21:24).

Hudson Taylor, after many weeks in a crowded sailing ship outward bound for China, remembering the tender parting with his mother, wrote, "How widely we are separated, who last year were so near. Praise God, He is unchangeable; His mercy never fails. I found in a book lent me by Captain Morris, the poem entitled, The Hebrew Mother, and was much affected by it. It caused me to remember the last time I heard it. Mother was present; my dearest… played it; and when we came to the lines: "I give thee to God, The God that gave thee"—Mother broke down; she clasped me in her arms, and wept aloud at the thought of our parting. May the Lord bless her and comfort her heart day by day… Jesus is precious. His service is perfect freedom. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Although absent from home, friends, and even country, Jesus is with me. He is all, and more than all. Much as my heart yearns to see them, the love of Christ is stronger, more constraining."

In Psalm 116, the question is asked, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" Oh, for a heart that, in return, is exercised about offering

thanksgivings to the Lord for the countless mercies received. Our hearts are so deceitful that we continually need to be stirred up, otherwise God will not get His portion (1 Cor. 16:2), much less voluntary offerings.

The Revised Version of Mal. 3:10, is striking: “Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

It was so in Hannah’s case; five children were given her for Samuel, whom she had loaned to the Lord. She got them all at once, the first recorded quintuplets. (One conception resulting in five children. Compare the language of Gen. 29:32-35, by way of contrast). God will be no man’s debtor. May the example of Hannah encourage us to give the Lord his place of pre-eminence in our lives, and He surely will pour out the richest of spiritual blessings upon us.

Beautiful Houses (Mar 1962)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 8 No. 3, Mar 1962.

This article, in the form of an address to young believers, was first given by brother Fletcher in the Bracondale Gospel Hall, Toronto, Canada.

God has been pleased to associate His truth with places as well as with persons. The names of Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, and of others are rich with valuable instruction. In like manner the names of Bethel, Jericho, Jordan, Jerusalem, and of other places have their own deep spiritual significance.

There are five very interesting places in the Gospel according to John which bear the prefix “Beth,” meaning “house.” May the Spirit of God direct us in our meditations as we would gather spiritual lessons from the meaning of these names and places.

Bethesda

The name Bethesda means “The house of Mercy.” It is mentioned in chapter five.

The “House of Mercy” suggests the truth of salvation, and reminds us of the beginning of spiritual life. It is described as having five porches. Morally speaking some waited long in the porch of feelings, others in the porch of good works, and still others in the porch of churchianity. Some even spent time in the porch of religious profession before they were brought to an end of themselves, as was the cripple in the story, and acknowledged their impotence. It was then, as did this lame man, they took the Lord Jesus at His word and

experienced healing from sin and its consequences. What a strking illustration of the words of the Saviour: “He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life!”

Bethabara

The name Bethabara appears in chapter one, verse twenty-eight. It was given that name because it was “the House of Passage.” Possibly this might suggest obedience in the Christian life.

We read that John was baptizing there because it was a fording place in the river Jordan, therefore, suitable for that purpose. We read about another place in this Gospel where John baptized “because there was much water there” (3:23).

The Lord Jesus told His disciples, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). What a baptism of suffering and sorrow! All true believers, in view of His baptism in death, should be willing to obey His wish. The Apostle Peter assures us that baptism is “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (I Pet. 3:21).

Bethlehem

This precious name means “House of Bread,” therefore conveys the idea of sustenance. Such, truly, was the One whom they did not recognize, but of whom they said, “Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was” (John 7:42).

As the manna sustained Israel for forty years in the wilderness, so our Lord Jesus is the bread of life to the

believer. To saints who apparently had been years in Christ, the Apostle Peter wrote, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2).

For spiritual strength, we must daily appropriate spiritual nourishment.

Bethsaida

The suggestion in this name is service for the Lord, for it means “House of Nets.” Of course, all service for the Master cannot be called public service; nevertheless, there is a work which all may do, a work in obscurity, maybe. We read, “Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph” (John 1:44-45).

Each one has been saved to serve, but let each remember that to be successful fishers of men, they must keep their net clean, mended, and cast into the sea (Mark 1:16-20. Luke 5:2).

Bethany

To the home in Bethany, which means the “House of Affliction,” the Lord Jesus came (John 11). Death had again broken the ties of a devout family in that region and left two sisters distraught and lonely. When He arrived, He expressed His sympathy in the most sincere manner, “Jesus wept.” In that circumstance, the Master spoke words of comfort, “The Master is come, and calleth for thee;” words of revelation, ‘Thy brother shall rise again;” and words of power, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were

dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

"Not a sorrow rends the heart, but the Man of Sorrows shares a part."

The Lord Jesus led His disciples out as far as to Bethany, "and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven."

It was while they still stood near Bethany, the House of Affliction, that "two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven" (Acts 1:10-11).

Soon, very soon, Christ will call His own away from this world of sorrow and trouble. As His own await that glorious moment, He comforts them and says, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

May we no longer be found confined to one of the porches by the pool of Bethesda, but may the pleasant liberty of these beautiful houses be ours. May we render implicit obedience to our Lord, and find in Him the true means of spiritual strength in order that we may serve Him more effectively. In all our trial may we turn to Him for He is touched with the feeling of our infirmity. May these be our daily experiences until the day dawn and the shadows flee away, the day when we shall leave this House of Affliction for the Father's house and the place our Saviour has there prepared.