

BULLETIN

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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Updates from Nathan C. Johnson

The Word of Truth Ministry is moving forward! Though we only released a single new Bulletin in 2021, that does not mean that the board isn't hard at work. There are many positive changes taking place at The Word of Truth Ministry that I find exciting.

First of all, we now once again have a full board of five members. Joining is Candy Davis, a member of my local Bible study in Minnesota who has written articles for the Bulletins and Seed and Breads in recent years. She joins the current board of Andrew Brown, Mark Hammond, Robert Juneau, and me as the Director. Rusty Hancock continues to serve the ministry as the Treasurer. Candy is full of new ideas, and will be a welcome addition to the Board!

We have also assembled a new team for writing, editing, and preparing the Bulletins. Candy has taken charge of this, with the help of Lisa Massengill of Colorado, who is a long-time follower of the ministry. Lisa grew up learning from Mr. Sellers with her mother, Nelle Richardson. Along with Rusty, this team of three will now be preparing and sending out the Bulletins; along with, of course, our writers.

We have been moving forward with our YouTube presence. Our channel, now appropriately renamed "The Word of Truth Ministry," includes videos from our recent conferences and audios from some of the earlier conferences. Yet we also recently kicked off our new "Video Library." Taking up from Mr. Sellers' old "Tape Library," these videos will be produced by various members of The Word of Truth Ministry, and will continue the audio legacy into our new era. First up is a series on "The Why Question" by me, your Director. These half-hour videos discuss why, with a good God in charge, this world is in such

a mess. Look for other Board members and friends of the ministry to produce their own videos as well.

Besides the YouTube work, our weekly radio program "Knowing God in the Word" continues in 15+ radio markets around the country. Presented by Bob Juneau with Nathan Johnson teaching, this program is currently covering the Gospel of Matthew, presenting material much like that taught by Mr. Sellers on Matthew in his TL series. Nathan and Bob are also planning a YouTube channel to go along with the radio ministry, which may attract even more new viewers.

Our 2021 conference had a smaller attendance than past years, as might be expected with concerns about SARS-CoV-2. But we still had a good crowd, and a very good topic. We considered "Understanding the Acts Period," and our excellent stable of familiar speakers presented much truth regarding God's work during that unique, 33-year period. Many of the sessions are already available for viewing on The Word of Truth Ministry YouTube channel. We are in the midst of plans for our annual 2022 conference, this year to be held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We will be considering the fate of the wicked after death, and the "problem passages" that many use to deny what is otherwise the Bible's truth regarding this fate.

Please stay patient with the ministry as we continue our current transition. We will continue to faithfully carry this legacy of truth forward. Feel free to let us know how we're doing!

The Malta Omission

By Nathan C. Johnson

A very interesting and instructive event is recorded for us in Acts 28:1-10. There we read of Paul and Luke, on their way to Rome for Paul to appear before Caesar, shipwrecked on the island of Malta. *'And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold'* (Acts 28:2, *New King James Version* used throughout). Paul unknowingly picked up a bundle of sticks in which a poisonous snake was resting. When he threw the bundle on the fire, the snake came out and bit him. The natives expected him to swell up or fall down dead, and when he did not, they decided he must be a god. This was a foolish and superstitious notion, and we would suspect that Paul would have strongly denied it, as he and Barnabas once did in Lystra, Acts 14:14-18. Yet though he may have done so, Luke does not record it, a strange omission.

Things get more interesting when we come to Acts 28, verse 7, where we read, *In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. 8. And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. 9. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.* This is interesting, but it reminds us very much of what Paul and all the other apostles did everywhere they ministered: signs and wonders, often having to do with healing, followed them. Then, the story seems to end quite typically in verse 10, *'They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.'*

This all seems quite normal, and we might be tempted to pass on from this story to the rest of Paul's journey to Rome, thinking that there is nothing really unusual to see here. Yet if we did so, we would be missing something very odd about this record. That unusual thing is not in what Luke says Paul did, but in what Luke doesn't say Paul did. In other words, there is a very interesting omission in the record of Paul at Malta.

If we would examine the record God gives of Paul's ministry in the book of Acts, we would see one very prominent feature. Starting in Salamis in Acts 13:5, we read of Paul and Barnabas that *they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.* At Antioch in Pisidia, we read of these two spreading the word of the Lord throughout all the region, Acts 13:49. At Iconium, we read that they testified to the truth in the synagogue, Acts 14:1, and worked signs and wonders, Acts 14:3. At Lystra, we see Paul speaking, Acts 14:9, and healing a man lame from birth, Acts 14:10. In

Acts 14:21, we read of Paul and Barnabas proclaiming the word in Derbe. From there, they took a return journey to Antioch in Syria, so completing Paul's first apostolic journey.

From these accounts we have established a pattern of Luke's record of Paul's ministry. Luke always records the fact of Paul proclaiming the word in a city, but he does not always record the miracles that Paul worked. Sometimes he does, and sometimes he does not. The consistent thing he always records, however, is the proclaiming of the word. This continues to be true in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Troas.

That brings us back to Malta, and points out to us the thing most significantly omitted from the record of Acts regarding Paul's ministry in this place. Of all the locations Paul visited, only in Malta do we read of him working miracles but not of him proclaiming Christ. As we pointed out earlier, we do not even read of Paul denying their mistaken idea that he was a god. While Luke might just have not mentioned it, if Paul really did not proclaim the gospel here, then it is likely he was not given the ability by the miracle of speaking in tongues to communicate with the islanders. In that case, he could not converse with them at all, since they did not speak the same language.

Why would Paul not have proclaimed the word in Malta? Surely, after the great miracles of healing Paul did for them, they would have been very open to it. The answer lies in God's work in the Acts period. God was sending out (authorizing) the gospel to the Jew first, Romans 1:16. The few Gentiles who believed were grafted into Israel's blessings and made part of an Israelite company, Romans 11:13-18. This was for the purpose of provoking the Jews to jealousy and saving some of them. If on Malta there were no Jews to provoke to jealousy, then Paul could not proclaim the message there. The islanders were simply not people for whom the message was intended at that time.

Why, then, did Paul heal these islanders? The answer to this is simple: they had blessed Paul, God's representative Israelite. We saw this in Acts 28:2, 7, and 10 above. God promised Abraham, Genesis 12:3, and later confirmed it of all Israel through Balaam, Numbers 24:9, *'Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you.'* These people earned a blessing from God by blessing Paul. This was enough to win them a share in the healing ministry of the Acts period. It was not enough to win them the proclamation of the gospel, however. That was reserved for places where Jews lived. That is the very important truth we can learn, if we are willing to see it, from the Malta omission.

The Miracles of Jesus

Andrew Brown

Jesus is underestimated in every way. This is not just outside of Christianity, but also inside of it. *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think* (Eph. 3:20) is more than just an eloquent idea, it is reality. Even when considering His well-known works, there is much more to grasp.

To have lived in the time of Jesus Christ and seen the miracles that He performed in the land of Palestine during those three years of His ministry would have been utterly mind-blowing to try to comprehend. Scripture gives us only passing statements of the surrounding towns bringing ALL their sick and injured to Jesus. This may seem to be brushed over by the gospel writers, for how could anyone epitomize the life and work of Jesus' activity here on earth? John's gospel sums up the whole matter by concluding, *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written* (John 21:25). The amount of work Jesus performed in the days that He walked the Earth is beyond what any author could describe, or audience could apprehend. (This is also true of the work He undertook during the days of creation.) Even if you lived at that time and saw the hype, you would be hard-pressed to get a front row seat in the crowds around Jesus. Take Zacchaeus for example; he needed to climb a sycamore tree in order to get a glimpse.

Jesus became famous in a very short time. *Jesus was going throughout all Galilee...and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people* (Mat. 4:23). Jesus went throughout a large area of land with millions of people living in it. The testimony is Jesus healed EVERYONE! The miracles of Jesus answered the people's problems. How many sicknesses and diseases were there? Jesus was up to every task. Think about the anguish that comes when a loved one has a disease. The vast numbers of desperate people seeking to get either themselves or their loved ones into the presence of Jesus must have been unprecedented! Consider how enormous healthcare is in our current world, with millions of people seeking medical help. The healing Jesus freely gave would supersede a growing healthcare industry.

Jesus' miracles presented the opportunity for guaranteed relief to a suffering person. He charged no money; complete healing was absolutely free. He would be intensely sought out. Though someone may have started after Him wondering if it was "too good to be

true," His record turned out to be impeccable. How much more must he have been sought after when the news continued to spread that Jesus was successful over and over again? *The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them* (Mat. 4:24). Imagine that He was now coming to a town near you. There was no sickness or pain too large or small. Jesus understood and wielded the ability to cure and make whole. There was a reason for His fame. Jesus did not disappoint the multitudes. The record is, *He healed them*.

The curiosity to see this man, even if one did not need healing, would have been tremendous. Were all the rumors and hype true? If we step back and focus on each gospel account, we will notice similar verses scattered throughout. *When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill* (Mat. 8:16). This was not an isolated incident, *Jesus was going through all the cities and villages...and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness* (Mat. 9:35). The account makes it seem like there was not a city or village where Jesus did not perform these works. The idea that people *brought to Him all who were sick* is repeated in Matthew 14:35-36. This work should never be minimized. Jesus continued to heal everyone the crowds brought to Him in Matthew 15:30-31. Anyone who compares and lines up the gospel accounts will soon realize these records of miracles are in each gospel, and also appear in many different locations. Truly, *this was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 'He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases'* (Mat. 8:17).

Jesus' miracles were far vaster and more expansive than we may realize and credit Him for. Scripture is not large enough to contain the plethora of activities Jesus did. Yet in spite of this there are numerous teachers who conclude two similar miracles are the same event. Let's not be quick to make this mistake. By claiming two different miracles are the same, the account of Scripture is blurred where it is meant to be distinct, and we fail to accurately esteem the Lord. Instead, we as believers should accept the account God has given. It is clear that Jesus could have easily performed a specific type of healing hundreds if not thousands of times. Jesus did *far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think*. May we see Him as He is and stand in awe of His many works!

Lessons from the Old Testament

By Steve Johnson

King Solomon once said, *'There is nothing new under the sun'* (Ecc. 1:9, NKJV used throughout). When we think of our lives and all the situations we face, whether in our work or home lives, we can always find examples in the Bible of people who experienced similar circumstances. What did they do and what were the consequences of their actions or lack thereof? Did they follow God's will and precepts to guide them through the situation, or did they go their own way? God can use His Word to teach us and guide our path, or we can ignore what we know is right.

Lately I have been reading through the section of the Bible that describes the kings who ruled over Israel and Judah. Of course the kings in that time had tremendous influence over their subjects. If they were good kings and the Israelites followed their lead, then God blessed the whole nation. However, if the king was not a Godly king, the people practiced evil, and often the people along with the king suffered God's punishment together. I also realize as I read about God's dealings, that I do not completely understand God's righteous judgments and how severe those judgments were sometimes. At other times grace was shown by God. Our ways are not God's ways and we don't always think like he does.

As I was reading in II Chronicles, I came to king Uzziah. I was excited because Uzziah became king at only 16 years old and 2 Chronicles 26:4 says of him that *he did right in the sight of the Lord according to all Amaziah his father had done*. Finally, a Godly man was ruling Judah! The passage also says in verse 3 of the same chapter: *he reigned 52 years in Jerusalem*, which says to me he was truly doing right in God's eyes. We see that many of the kings were so evil that their reigns ended abruptly after a very short time when God said, enough! The passage goes on to tell about all the blessings God gave Uzziah and all the good he did for Judah. He was marvelously helped and became very strong as he fought the Philistines, the Arabians, and the Meunites. His fame spread even as far as Egypt. God blessed Uzziah as he dug wells in the desert for his livestock and built towers for defense. He had skillful men who invented devices to shoot arrows and stones from his towers. His army numbered 307,500, with mighty men of valor as chief officers to help the king against their enemies.

I was feeling really good about Uzziah and his walk with God. His fame grew as he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in visions, so God made him prosper. Then as I read to verse 16 of chapter 26 of II Chronicles, I came to a disappointing BUT. *But when he*

was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense. Uzziah knew this very basic principle: that the priesthood were the consecrated ones to burn incense to God, not the common people or even the king. God's punishment to Uzziah was that of inflicting him with leprosy and thus isolation from his people, and this ended his otherwise very successful and long reign.

So what can we learn and what lesson can we apply to ourselves? Today in the dispensation of grace God won't strike us with leprosy if we sin. We have never ruled over anyone, let alone a nation as great as Judah. We also know God has given us His Word (*Logos*) as we read in Psalm 119:105, *Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*.

Whether we are at work or home, with others, or by ourselves, are we living seeking God's instructions for our daily lives? We all have temptations and our individual temptations always come where we are weak. Maybe we can look at Uzziah and criticize him, but we should always look in the mirror first.

For me, I find I can be covetous of others either for what they can do, or their possessions. Fortunately, as I get older, I am realizing that what I have in the Lord far exceeds anything the world has to offer. Solomon's wisdom about riches, that they are to please the eye (Ecc. 1:8), is a reminder of how meaningless such things of this world really should be to us. I recently saw a commercial with a famous athlete who won 4 gold medals in swimming at the Olympics, and he was now a shriveled old man. So much for the permanence of physical accomplishments!

To me, Uzziah shows us we must be on guard to never let down our defenses and never get puffed up by our successes. We need to live our entire lives for Him. We know God is dealing with us in silence today, but He instructs us through His Word. As Paul concludes in II Timothy 4:7, *'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.'* Uzziah didn't reach the finish line. Even though we may be tempted like Uzziah to be proud in our own successes, we have to keep in mind that without Christ in our lives we are nothing. Uzziah at the end of his life found out too late about the danger of self-pride and paid an awful price. As we all long for the Kingdom of God to become a reality, maybe the finish line is closer than we know, so keep on following our great God!