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Who is God save the Lord? or who is a rock save our God?

—Psalms 18:31



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Bible Lens

Unreality

**March 30–
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Unreality

from the Responsive Reading

Psalms 101:4

A froward heart shall depart from me.

Froward (Hebrew, ‘*iqqēš*’) is also translated *perverse* or *crooked*—the opposite of the “perfect heart” described in verse 2. Some see this psalm as a leader’s commitment to righteous government, as an “oath of office” to uphold divine justice.

from Section 2

4 | II Chronicles 20:1, 3

The children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.... And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

Jehoshaphat was the fourth king of Judah. He reigned for 25 years and was considered a wise and pious ruler. During his tenure he initiated a program of instruction in the law throughout his realm and worked to cleanse the kingdom of idolatry (see 17:6–9).

At this time, a coalition of enemy forces is only a day’s journey from Jerusalem. In the face of this threat, Jehoshaphat turns to Yahweh for guidance and protection. His public prayers are answered through the Levite Jahaziel (see 20:14–17), whose words echo a similar divine assurance earlier given by Moses: “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord” (Exodus 14:13).

God’s salvation takes form in an unexpected way—the combined armies fight among themselves and destroy each other (see II Chronicles 20:23, 24). News of this reaches those kingdoms, “and the fear of God was on [them], when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel” (v. 29).

from Section 3

6 | Matthew 4:17

Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Preach (Greek, *kēryssō*) describes the proclaiming or publishing act of a herald. A commentary notes three characteristics of a herald’s declaration: It was certain; it carried authority; and it originated from a source beyond the messenger. Christ Jesus opens his public ministry with John the Baptist’s heralding words (see 3:1, 2)—a message from God, delivered with certainty and authority.

7 | Matthew 13:2

Great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

Jesus assumes the traditional seated position of a teacher, with students standing to receive instruction (see other instances in Mark 9:35 and John 8:2). He shares seven parables on this occasion, most of them introduced with the phrase “The kingdom of heaven is like” One source writes that parables “often draw from everyday, peas-

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ant life, but an unexpected twist underlines the surprising, gracious, demanding ... nature of God’s reign.”

A cove on the Sea of Galilee has been identified as the possible site of this event. Called the Cove of the Parables or Cove of the Sower, it forms a natural amphitheater that can accommodate thousands of people. Modern-day tests confirm its acoustics—a speaker on the shore can be easily heard from over three hundred feet (one hundred meters) away.

from Section 5

11 | Acts 9:1, 2

Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

“Any of this way” is likely a reference to the early Christian name for Christ’s teachings: “the way” (see other examples in Acts 19:9, 24:14). Jesus had declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6)—undoubtedly an offensive statement to Jews like Saul.

Damascus, a large city in the Roman province of Syria about six days’ journey from Jerusalem, had a Jewish population estimated at more than 20,000. Because Rome had given overall control of Jewish affairs to the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, Saul needed letters of authority to purge the Damascus synagogues of Jesus’ followers.

11 | Acts 9:17, 18

Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Throughout Scripture, the hand is a common representation of God’s might. Hands were employed in the Old Testament for blessing, appointment to office, or other identification (see Genesis 48:14–20 and Numbers 27:18–20, for instance). In the New Testament, laying on of hands was used by Jesus and his apostles to denote God’s presence and power. Ananias’ “putting his hands” on Saul follows this model.

Saul’s dramatic “conversion” was not a change of religion; those who followed “the way” still considered themselves Jews. The transformation Saul underwent—illustrated by his healing of blindness—opened his eyes to Christ’s teachings. Three days earlier he had questioningly addressed Jesus as “Lord” in the road to Damascus; now he openly “preach[es] Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). His baptism symbolizes the washing away of his history of wrongdoing and seals his new status as a believer.

Resources quoted in this issue

Cit. 6: Barclay, William. *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 2. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1955. Revised and updated by Saint Andrew, 2001. Reprinted as *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 2. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001–04.

Cit. 7: Harrelson, Walter J., ed. *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003.