

was totally ignorant of the Word of God until the day of his repentance in Babylon (II Chron. 33:11-13)? Yet the Bible expressly mentions God's Word coming to Manasseh and the people before this (II Chron. 33:10; cf. II Kings 21:10-15)!

Perhaps the most obvious instance of a person in Scripture that refutes this bizarre interpretation of the Parable of the Sower is Saul of Tarsus or Paul the apostle. He well knew the contents of the Old Testament and he heard deacon Stephen's apologetic speech, for he watched over the discarded garments of those who stoned the martyr (Acts 7). Saul, an ardent Pharisee, would hardly have been ignorant of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth or that of His disciples and, surely, he heard the gospel from the Christians he hauled away to prison (Acts 8:3). Yet he was only converted later on the Damascus Road (Acts 9).

Having said that various elect people in Scripture were not converted the first time they heard the Word, it is worth mentioning some in the Bible who believed when, it would appear, they were first exposed to the truth of the gospel, such as, Adam and Eve (Gen. 3), Naaman (II Kings 5), the woman at the well and other Samaritans (John 4), Sergius Paulus (Acts 13) and the Philippian jailor (Acts 16).

At least three lessons may be drawn from all this. The first concerns the interpretation of Christ's parables. Do not press them into making points that are not their purpose. The Parable of the Sower is designed to show, among other things, that not all believe the preached gospel and that those who reject it do so for different worldly and carnal reasons. The imagery of sowing is not to be forced to the point of *one* sowing, for this is not stated either in the parable itself or its interpretation (Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23).

Second, let us admire the longsuffering of God to His elect. Paul, who had long heard and rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ, declared, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (I Tim. 1:16). Despite all our terrible sins, both before (cf. I Tim. 1:13, 15) and after our conversion, the Triune God does not cast off and reject any of His eternally chosen and blood-bought people. Where would all of us be now, if it were not so?

Third, let us imitate God's longsuffering, including His patience with us in our foolishness and disobedience, in our witness to, and intercessions for, those outside of Christ. We must "exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2). "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecc. 11:1)! *Rev. Stewart*

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For a superb exposition of the Parable of the Sower and all Christ's parables that illustrates how they are to be interpreted properly, read Prof. Hanko's hardback, *The Mysteries of the Kingdom* (432 pp.), available from the CPRC Bookstore for £18 (plus £1.80 for UK P&P).

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Upcoming Lectures: (1) Rev. Stewart will speak on "Jan Hus: His Martyrdom and Ecclesiology" at the CPRC in Ballymena on 30 October at 7:30 PM (like our 11AM and 6PM services, this lecture is live streamed at [www.cprf.co.uk/live.html](http://www.cprf.co.uk/live.html)). (2) Rev. McGeown will speak on "Spiritual Gifts" at The Round Chapel, Margam, S. Wales, on 19 November at 7:15 PM.

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# Covenant Reformed News

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## Only One Opportunity to Believe?

A reader in England asked about an interpretation of the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23) that he heard a while ago: Does this parable teach that everyone only has one opportunity to believe the gospel, namely, the first time they hear it?

First of all, it is worth pointing out that, if this view were correct, there would be no positive point in witnessing to or praying for anyone whom you know has already heard the gospel, once or more often, and not been converted. No one will ever be saved on their second or subsequent appearances in church and there is no hope to motivate anyone to invite them. Likewise, godly wives have no possibility of winning their unbelieving husbands to Christ after their first encounter with the Word of God (I Cor. 7:16; I Pet. 3:1), for their husbands' first rejection of the Lord Jesus is tantamount to the unpardonable sin. Moreover, all who claim to be Christians but were not converted when they first heard the gospel (like myself, many readers of the *News* and various worthies in church history, such as Augustine) are not actually believers but only hypocrites!

One wonders what someone holding this strange interpretation of the Parable of the Sower would say about church discipline. Should the church also only give one opportunity for repentance to the professed believer who is erring? But this would contradict God's unbreakable Word (John 10:35) in Matthew 18:15-18!

Beside drawing out the necessary implications of this novel view, the most simple and direct way of contradicting this teaching, that unbelief of the first presentation of the gospel that one hears seals one's destruction, is to look at scriptural evidence to the contrary.

Are we to think that all the 3,000 people saved on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41) had never heard the Word preached by Christ or His twelve disciples (Luke 9) or the seventy (Luke 10)? Likewise, is it really the case that the 5,000 men converted in Jerusalem, plus women, had not heard the gospel in the days of Christ's prodigious public ministry or at Pentecost or through the apostles until the very day on which they believed (Acts 4:4)? Acts 6:7 states, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." Are we to conclude that all these people and priests in Jerusalem were ignorant of the gospel all the time before this?

Beside the mass conversions in Jerusalem in the early chapters of Acts, we can point to individuals. Did the penitent thief really only hear the gospel on the day of his crucifixion (Luke 23:39-43)? Are we to assume that ungodly Manasseh, king of Judah,

*(continued on p. 4)*

## The Postponement of Shimei's Punishment

A young lady from Colorado writes, "David previously spared Shimei's life, though Shimei cursed him, because David knew that Shimei's wickedness was in God's hands (II Sam. 16). But, in I Kings 2:8-9, David later tells Solomon to bring Shimei down to the grave with blood. Is this God's judgment on Shimei (through David) for his cursing David, for David tells Solomon not to hold Shimei guiltless? Is this simply David executing justice as king? Why is it that David now appears to uphold justice? Was it an admirable thing that he upheld justice in the end but was not defensive at first as he confessed God's sovereignty in II Samuel 16?"

There can be no question about it that Shimei sinned dreadfully when he cursed David during the king's flight from Absalom his son. The event is recorded in II Samuel 16:5-14. Abishai, one of David's top generals, wanted to kill Shimei but David prevented him from doing that.

David's belief in, and confession of, God's absolute sovereignty over the sins of wicked Shimei is amazing! "And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah? so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him. It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day" (II Sam. 16:10-12).

Shimei's cursing of David was worthy of death because Shimei was one who believed that Saul and his sons should still have been on the throne of the nation. He did not believe, as God Himself had made clear, that God had deposed Saul and his sons for disobedience, and that David was the man of God's choice.

Further, Shimei cursed God's magistrate and thus violated a fundamental principle of God's law, namely, that one has to honour and be in submission to those in authority over them, as the fifth commandment requires.

It is also quite possible that Shimei knew that David was in the line of Christ and was king as a type of Christ. After all, Jacob had already prophesied that Christ would come from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and not from the tribe of Benjamin, from which tribe Saul came. It may very well be that Psalm 89 had already been written, in which psalm David is said to be the one whose son would build the temple of God and sit on the throne.

David humbled himself and endured Shimei's cursing because he received his ignominious flight from Absalom as God's chastening. God had told David, through Nathan the prophet, that the sword would never depart from his house after his sin of adultery and murder (II Sam. 12:9-10). Only God could remove His chastening hand from David.

II Samuel 19:18-23 tells us that upon David's restoration to the throne, Shimei,

fearful of his life, begged to be forgiven. Again, David promised not to execute him. The Bible does not tell us why but the reason may be that David did not want to mar with bloodshed that happy day when he was restored to the kingdom.

Whatever reasons David may have had, he left some matters undone and, on his death bed, he charged Solomon, his son and successor, to take care of them (I Kings 2:5-9). There were men who had committed grave sins and had never been punished for them.

Joab was executed for his murder of Abner, the general of Saul and Ishbosheth, and Amasa, the newly appointed general of David's armies, and for his part in the conspiracy to put Adonijah, David's fourth son (II Sam. 3:4), on the throne instead of Solomon (I Kings 2:28-34).

Adonijah, who conspired to make himself king instead of Solomon, was executed only after he asked permission to marry Abishag, a concubine of David (I Kings 2:13-25). Perhaps he was only killed then because Solomon interpreted his request as implying that Adonijah was going to mount a second attempt to gain the throne. It seems to have been a custom in those days that a successor to a king's throne also took the concubines as his own (II Sam. 3:7-8; 16:21-22).

Abiathar also deserved to be executed, for he joined Adonijah in his conspiracy to become king, but was spared because, as a priest of God, he had served David well. Nevertheless, he was deposed from his office (I Kings 2:26-27).

Solomon initially spared Shimei from a deserved death but told him to stay within Jerusalem. When he disobeyed, he was executed. He showed by his disobedience that he had no more respect for Solomon than he did for David and that he was not truly sorry for his sin. Though he was initially spared by both David and Solomon, he brought upon himself just judgment when he showed he had not genuinely repented (I Kings 2:36-46).

When we were children, my father said that David spared Joab because David was afraid of Joab and that, towards the end of his life, David wrongly left the "dirty work" of meting out justice upon those who deserved it to Solomon because he knew Solomon was very wise and so would know how to handle these difficult matters. Moreover, my father reckoned that David no longer had the energy to shed more blood, something he had done all his earlier years as king. The reader may judge whether these comments are a fair analysis of the situation.

*Prof. Hanko*

*For more on Shimei, listen to or watch "Absalom and His Rebellion (II)," 9 sermons on II Samuel 15:24-18:33, available on the CPRC website ([www.cprc.co.uk/audio/OTseries.htm#absalom](http://www.cprc.co.uk/audio/OTseries.htm#absalom)) and in an attractive box set on CD or DVD for £10 (inc. P&P in the UK) from the CPRC Bookstore.*

### Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

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