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SILVER STAR BIBLE SCHOOL 1996

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN THE PROPHETS

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Class #6

The Glory of God and Jesus Standing...

Reading: Isaiah 64

My dear brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ

As we come to the last chapter of Mark's gospel record, we've almost run out of references to the prophecy of Isaiah. We started in chapter one, when Isaiah and Malachi were caught up together, in presenting to us the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And those two Old Testament prophecies are referred to again, in chapter 16 of Mark, as it were, rounding off the consideration which the inspired gospel writer has developed for us, in the ministry of the Master.

In the account of the resurrection, there are two little hints of the train of thought that we've been following. In verse 2 of Mark 16, 'Very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre', and only Mark says, 'at the rising of the sun'. That's what Malachi 4 has led us to expect, 'the sun, S-U-N of righteousness will arise, with healing in his beams', and the sun rising was seen in the resurrection of the Lord, and the everlasting life that He would ultimately bring. And as we've already mentioned, in verse 5, when the women went to the tomb, and the stone was rolled away, entering in they saw, what Mark describes as a 'young man'; not an angel, though he was an angel no doubt, but describes him in the language we've come to expect from Isaiah chapter 40, where the contrast is to be found between the 'ewes that faint' and those that 'are effortless' in their activities because they can mount up with eagles wings like unto the angels.

And so Mark in this last chapter, draws these threads together, and shows us that it is through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all that was promised in the prophets, was to find its ultimate fulfillment, that He who had suffered as a lamb, would return to life everlasting, and then come again to establish that kingdom, of which the promises of God, spoke so eloquently through the prophets. When we come to the end of Mark 16, the last picture that we have of the Lord, is in verses 19 and 20. 'So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God', now it's interesting that our classes today, really all tie in very closely

together, both bro. Colin's class on Deuteronomy and bro. Jim's class of the Psalms, for here in verse 19, we have Psalm 110, this is what Mark is directing us to. That the Lord Jesus sat on the right hand of the majesty on High as the Melchizedek priest, to intercede for us but also to administer as a King, that power that was now vested in Him. So verse 20 says, 'And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following', so it was because the Lord Jesus Christ was at the right hand of God, that the Holy Spirit was poured out, and under the direction of their Lord, the disciples went with signs and wonders confirming what the Lord had said to them.

Well, now we're going to move into the Acts of the apostles, to see the continuing acts of the Lord Jesus Christ, through His apostles; and we're going to allow Stephen in Acts chapter 6 and 7 to conclude our thoughts from the prophets. For it is this section of Acts which, we might say, is the epilogue to Mark's record. The end of Mark sees the Lord Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of God; Acts chapter 7 takes us that one stage further, where we see the Lord Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God, and on the verge of returning to this earth, to deliver His saints.

Let's look then at Acts chapter 6 and verses 13, 14 and 15. The charge against Stephen, a man who was full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, was 'that he spoke against this holy place and the law'. And verse 14, 'For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel'. Well, what did they see when they saw his face? Oftentimes when angels appeared, there was nothing special to see in their face; they appeared as men and weren't recognized as angels immediately. So it can't have been that, that the account is drawing attention to; surely, it is in relation to Moses in verse 14. This was the central issue, this man is speaking against Moses, and all that Moses established, and the special place that we have as the covenant people. Of course, thinking of covenant, in terms of law and not of faith; but when you think of Moses' face, perhaps we have a clue as to what was happening with Stephen's face.

We know very well what happened as recorded in Exodus chapter 34 and verse 29, 'And it came to pass when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand; that he came down from the Mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him'. So is it possible that Stephen's face literally shone with the power of the Holy Spirit, so that when they looked intently at him, there was an unique appearance about this man? Something was drawing their attention to an echo of the past; they who placed so much store by Moses, could they fail to see some connection now in the face of this man? You may have your own thoughts as to what happened in the face of Stephen, there was something very special about it. And you notice how in chapter 7 of the Acts, Stephen begins his address, verse 2 he said, 'Men, brethren and fathers, hearken: The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham', here's a man whose face was seen as if it had been, the face of an angel, speaking of the God of glory. This was a remarkable witness, and they must have listened and watched intently, as he took them through the history of God's

people, showing how time and time again the people of God had rejected the ones whom God had sent to save them. And all that, outside of this land which he said he spoke against, they didn't really understand their own history.

When we come to verse 55, and the final statement of this man's life, 'But he being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.' He was allowed to see even further than Psalm 110! where the Son of man was sitting on the right hand of God. The glory of God in the face of this man, could see, even to the next stage of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Stephen was allowed to die for his faith, with a vision of the kingdom, shining more brightly in his mind, than it had shone in any other, besides the One who he saw.

It's fitting then, when we come to the end of Stephen's speech and that twist in the presentation of the scriptures which he makes, that it's to the prophet Isaiah and to that last section of Isaiah, that he calls our attention to. He quotes from Isaiah chapter 66 verses 1 and 2 when he's trying to explain to the rulers that the physical structure of the temple, which they were so proud of, was not really the temple of God, spoken of in the prophets. That it is inconceivable that the Lord of heaven and earth could be contained within a building made by man. And he goes to Isaiah chapter 66 for these words, 'Thus saith Yahweh, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith Yahweh: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word'. This is the teaching that we've seen in earlier chapters of Isaiah, when the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, is pleased to dwell with him that is of a contrite heart and humble spirit. God was looking for poor and contrite people, who trembled at His Word, so that He might dwell amongst them and ultimately in them, in that kingdom to be established. That was the Spirit of Christ in Isaiah!

But how far removed were the rulers from that contrite spirit? And so he doesn't use those words of them. We know what happens, he breaks off from Isaiah 66 verse 2, and substitutes the words of other prophets. For instead of saying, 'but to this man will I look', this is what he says, 'ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears; ye do always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom we have now been the betrayers and murderers. We have received the Law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it'. It was a withering criticism; they knew that scripture better than we do! in terms of being able to recite those words; they knew what was to come as he took them through, line by line. And when they were awaiting to hear the words, 'but to this man will I look', 'ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears', and they knew those words as well. For those words come from the same passage that the Lord Jesus Christ directed them to, when he cleansed the temple in Jeremiah chapter 7.

In that section Jeremiah 6 and 7 and a little further on, we find there the account,(let's just look at Jeremiah chapter 6 verse 10, of the people at the time who trusted in the

temple of Yahweh). Jeremiah's told to go in to the entrance of the temple and witness against this people. Jeremiah chapter 6 verse 10, 'To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised and they cannot hearken: behold, the Word of Yahweh is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it'. Their ears were uncircumcised, they were covered over; flesh had blotted out the sound of the voice of the Word of God.

Jeremiah chapter 9 and verse 26, it says verse 25, 'Behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart'. So that very section of Jeremiah, the Lord had quoted in the temple; there's a reference in chapter 6 to uncircumcision of the ears, in chapter 9 to uncircumcision of the heart, and Stephen says, 'ye uncircumcised in heart and ears'; he's drawing attention to a point they had already noted when the Lord Jesus Christ had spoken to them. And Jeremiah in turn is taking hold of a passage that bro. Colin has directed our attention to earlier on in Deuteronomy chapter 10.

Deuteronomy chapter 10 and verse 16, where we find the Spirit of Christ in the Law, speaking about what God required of His people. In verse 15, 'Yahweh had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them; even you above all the people as it is this day. Circumcise therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no more stiffnecked', and Stephen says, 'ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised of heart and ear'. In two lines he catches the Spirit of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, which of course, is linked closely together, as a witness against them, of what they were doing.

He reminds them in verse 52, of how their fathers had treated the prophets of old, in whom the Spirit of Christ spoke. And he goes through in verse 52, what the Lord had taught in a parable recorded in Mark chapter 12. 'That when He went into the temple, the Lord taught about the husbandman who refused to yield the fruit to the owner of the vineyard; but the owner of the vineyard sent his servants. They beat some and killed others, but still he sent his servants to seek fruit of that nation. And the last of those servants or the last but one, you could say was Malachi; and then John the Baptist, and last of all, he sent his only beloved son. And they knew, brethren and sisters, that he spoke that parable against them; they understood perfectly the point He was making, that that line of rejection was the history of their own people; they knew that! And just like the last piece of the jigsaw, they could understand what He was saying. They knew He was the son; I don't believe they knew He was the Son of God, but I do believe that they knew the truth of what the Lord said in the parable, 'behold this is the heir; come, let us kill him that the inheritance might be ours'. They killed the Lord Jesus Christ because they were worried that the Romans would come and take away their place; that if they got rid of this man, they would retain the inheritance for themselves. But why was this man such a threat? because they knew He was the son of David!

The genealogy in Matthew chapter 1, appears to be an official family tree of the Lord

Jesus Christ. It has been suggested that those family trees were kept by the scribes in the temple. How else did they know to go to Bethlehem? and how else was it acceptable, that these people from up in Galilee should come down to Bethlehem, and be registered there? There must have been some official document or record, to accept them for what they said they were! And anyway, the family tree of Joseph and Mary could easily have been checked, and it would have disproved the claims that Christ was making, and the officials with access to those, could easily have discredited any imposter, because all they had to do was prove that this man was not descended from David, and you've ruled out His legitimate claims to be the Messiah.

And do you remember that Nicodemus was involved in that? They said, 'Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet; search and look', they said to him. Now he was the official theologian of the Sanhedrin, so what would he have done? This man was honourable; well, that's absolutely right! if this man comes from Nazareth, then He's not the Messiah. And I do believe that he searched and looked. The next time we meet him, he's got with him, myrrh! Where did he get the myrrh from? Where would you search and look? Go and ask Mary? Where was He born Mary? Bethlehem. So he's officially the son of Joseph? Yes. What's Joseph's family tree? Ah, so he is the rightful heir. Do you have any proof of this? Is that where the myrrh came from? Given by the kings for his burial! They knew He was the heir; that's why He was such a dangerous man. And Stephen is reminding them of that parable; they wouldn't have got it very quickly, would they?

And now, His disciples embolden by some extraordinary actions, were saying He was alive, and sitting at the right hand of God, in fulfillment of Psalm 110; not only was He the King, He was a Melchizedek king-priest! And even the man that told them that, his face shone, as proof that he had been with the God of glory! In verse 51, Stephen is still in Isaiah's prophecy, when he goes on to say, 'Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do ye'. Let's just have a look back in Isaiah chapter 63.

There's a train of thought which carries through into chapter 66, where he's already taken us. The resistance to the Holy Spirit was something which the father's had done in the wilderness. Isaiah chapter 63 verse 9, 'In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them', so they had resisted the Holy Spirit as their fathers had done, even in the wilderness when Moses was leading them.

But his thoughts continue, and the wonderful thing is, brethren and sisters, that God answers Stephen in the same vision that he has cause to use in his preaching. If we look closely at Isaiah chapter 64, here is the appeal of the prophet on behalf of the nation, for that good news of the gospel to come to the people. That just as God had brought the nation together and into a covenant at Sinai, when the mountain had shaken, and the presence of the God of heaven had come down upon the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire, and was all of a smoke; when dramatic events had taken place, that God would repeat that; that He would once more come down from

heaven, and gather His people into a covenant relationship. Not now, under Law, but in the spirit of the New Covenant. Verse 1, 'Oh, that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the water to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence', it's the repetition of Sinai, that God would rend the heavens and come down. Of course, that's the way the gospel record of Mark begins; the inspired writer is directing us to the fulfillment of those words in chapter 1 of the gospel record. In verse 10, when the Lord Jesus Christ comes up out of the waters of baptism, it says, 'And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened', and the margin will show you, that the word 'opened' means 'to be rent'; He saw the heavens rent and the spirit like a dove 'descending upon Him'. It was the answer to the prayer of Isaiah, 'Oh, that thou wouldest rend the heavens' and he saw the heavens rent and the Spirit of God come down and descend onto the Lord Jesus Christ. The consequence was the fulfillment of verse 4 of Isaiah chapter 64, 'For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him'. So that when the heavens were to be rent asunder, and God would come down, something so marvellous would be revealed that it had not been seen nor heard. It could not be imagined and although this verse is sometimes used to speak of the wonders of the kingdom age, in the sense of there will be things so marvellous for us to comprehend now; things that are beyond our appreciation in our mortal state.

That's not what this verse is speaking about! For this verse has been fulfilled. The apostle Paul tells us that because he shows it in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 9. Verse 8 he says of the gospel that, 'None of the princes of this world knew it' (the wise, the rulers, the scribes, the Pharisees, didn't have an inkling of what Isaiah was speaking about). For he says in verse 8, 'For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory', now this man who wrote this epistle, stood there watching Stephen being stoned to death and heard what Stephen said, 'that the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham'. And he says, 'they would not have crucified the Lord of glory had they known'. Verse 9, 'But as it is written, 'Eye hath not seen nor ear hear neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him', quoting Isaiah chapter 64 and verse 4. 'But God has revealed Him unto us, by His spirit', so through the Spirit of God coming down onto the Lord Jesus Christ, and then through the Pentecost outpouring upon the apostles, the Spirit of God had revealed that Word of the kingdom, so eyes could now see and ears could now hear, what God had in store for them that love Him!

Do you see what Isaiah is saying in chapter 64? Those four verses have been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah 64 verse 5, 'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, Thou are wroth: for we have sinned in those is continuance, and we shall be saved', so in the things of the gospel revealed, was to be salvation for the people.

The prophecy goes on to speak about the righteousness of Israel at this time, as filthy rags. That was uncleanness under the Law when you trace backward what 'filthy rags' are. Their righteousness was fading like a leaf, reminding us of Isaiah 40, 'and all flesh is grass'. Their city was to go into ruin, a prophecy in verse 10 and 11, of the Roman destruction in AD 70, leaving Isaiah in verse 12 in the spirit of the prophecy, to plead for the restoration of favour, to the nation. But before that comes, before the nation of Israel is brought back into covenant relationship with God, we've got Isaiah chapter 65. In Isaiah chapter 65 verse 1, is a prophecy of the Gentiles being brought into the hope of Israel. And our authority for saying that is again, the apostle Paul. Just have a look at this chapter in Romans 10; this is a chapter about Isaiah's prophecy! It's a remarkable chapter, Romans chapter 10; the theme starts earlier on in chapter 9, and we're not going to look at it in great detail, but just look in Romans chapter how Isaiah's prophecy chapter by chapter, is presented to us, the Spirit of Christ in the prophets.

Speaking about the gospel in verse 14, he says, 'How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written (this time in Isaiah 52) How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!' Isaiah 52 says, 'the feet of Him' but now those feet have been multiplied through the work of Christ in the apostles. Isaiah 52 verse 7 in verse 15 of Romans chapter 10.

Verse 16, 'But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith (Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 1) 'LORD, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God'. Then he goes on to quote Psalm 19, Deuteronomy 32 and now in verse 20, 'But Isaiah is very bold, and saith (Isaiah chapter 65 verse 2) 'I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me. But to Israel He saith, 'All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.' And you see how the apostle is taking us through Isaiah's prophecy; and it proves to us, doesn't it? that chapter 65 and verse 1 and 2, is about the gospel in verse 1 going to the Gentiles, because in verse 2 the Jewish nation had rejected the work of the apostles.

Well, Isaiah 65 is a detailed chapter that we can't look into; it's the chapter which prophesies of a nation, Israel, who are represented as in the state of a man called 'Legion'. If you haven't seen the connections between 'Legion' of Isaiah 65 and 66, well, perhaps you'd like to look at them later on; just compare, for example, verse 4 of Isaiah 65 and verse 11 and chapter 66 and verse 4 with the record in Mark 5 of 'Legion', and I think you'll agree, that 'Legion' is a picture of Israel, who have departed from the Spirit of Christ in the prophets and have been occupied with an unclean spirit, which leads them to rage and rave as it were, outside of the bounds of the covenants of promise. (That's just by the way!)

So then we come to chapter 66 of Isaiah, and we can see then, how this is developing. 64 begins with the appeal for God to rend the heavens and come down. It's being fulfilled in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, inasmuch as through that advent, the spirit

of the gospel was made manifest. The gospel which spoke of the restoration of Israel, to covenant relationship with God, and the kingdom of God established, but a message rejected by the nation, and therefore a message which was offered now, to those who would accept it, the Gentiles. A nation that was going to be made into a people that would be fit habitations for God through the Spirit. That's what Stephen is trying to explain in Acts chapter 7. Then we come to the answer which God gives to Stephen.

In Acts chapter 7 and verse 54, the reaction of the nation to what Stephen has said, is quite dramatic really. It's very, very difficult to understand isn't it, how they could have responded in this way? How they were so blind that they couldn't see what was happening; even when a man's face lit up as it were, with the glory of God, that was not sufficient. And even when they understood intellectually the logic of the argument, and couldn't deny the miracles which were being done, still couldn't see the truth. And the irony of that situation comes out when we compare verse 54 with verse 51. Stephen had accused them of being uncircumcised in heart, and verse 54 says, 'When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart', not in a constructive way; it was not a circumcision of the heart, it was a piercing of the heart. In contrast in verse 55, 'But he being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, (and notice his words!) Behold, I see the heavens opened'; the heavens had never closed, God had rent the heavens and come down. And now for Stephen, he could look up and the heavens were still open, and he could see all that was going on in God's purpose. For there at the right hand of God, on the Melchizedek throne, was the Son of man. The Son of man as bro. Jim was explaining to us, representing the One to whom God had given dominion and authority to judge the earth, and he sees the Son of man, not sitting now but standing. What did he see? In a moment in which he was to die, he looked up to heaven, the heavens were open, still open, and he saw Jesus rising up from His seat, and coming towards him. He saw the return of the Lord Jesus Christ; 'precious in His sight, is the blood of His saints'.

Verse 57, 'Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears', 'ye uncircumcised in ears'; remember the miracle of the Lord, when He put His finger into a man's ears, and unstopped his ears? In the face of that, they stopped their ears that they might not hear any more. 'And they ran upon him with one accord. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him': and it that they fulfilled Isaiah chapter 66, which prophesied of them doing just that!

Isaiah 66 verse 5, 'Hear the word of Yahweh, ye that tremble at His word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let Yahweh be glorified: but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed'. Now wasn't that a very special message for Stephen?; he knew that verse, he just quoted to them the first two verses. He knew that verse 4 had been fulfilled in the preaching of the gospel, of which he had been a recipient, and here now was a special word of comfort for those like he, who would trembled at God's word. Your brethren that hated you that cast you out, Acts 7 verse 58, 'and they cast him out of the city.' They thought they were doing the Lord's work; they said, 'Let Yahweh be glorified, but He shall appear to your joy' and that's

exactly what He did; he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, appearing to his joy. At the most, Paul, the man at whose feet they laid down their clothes, he must have had such bitter memories of his participation in the murder of a just man, like a nightmare memory throughout his life; but for Stephen, the one who suffered these things, it was a moment of supreme joy! for he was allowed to see the Lord Jesus Christ appearing, as it were to come, and establishing that throne upon earth. In that appearing, they, those that have rejected the Lord shall be ashamed.

And Isaiah concludes with that picture; it's not the way we would have finished off a prophecy which is so magnificent, in its spiritual insight, is it? But for you and I, (as the last verse describes the carcasses of those who've been rejected, rotting in Gehenna), that's the picture of Isaiah 66, the source of the Lord's own words of warning. 'Where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched', and of all the things that Isaiah could have recorded as the climax to his prophecy, that must be the greatest surprise! And although we'd like to finish in a different way, and on a different note, let us be true to what we are studying, and bring our thoughts to the way the Lord Jesus Christ used that verse, in Mark chapter 9.

In Mark chapter 9, the Lord gives us that sober warning, speaking of the responsibility and commitment He requires, if we are to inherit the kingdom. Verse 43, 'And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into Gehenna, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched: And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched'.

This is what Isaiah is leading us to! There may be things in our lives, brethren and sisters, that we have not yet set aside; there may be things that we see, things that we put our hands to, ways in which we walk, which do not fit the way of holiness which leads to everlasting life. And it is better for us now, to not just resolve, but to implement those decisions which are required of us, for our good, that we might like Stephen, see the Lord Jesus Christ appearing to our joy, and not to our shame! And if our consideration of the Spirit of Christ in the Prophets and in the Law and in the Psalms, help us to that end, then our bible school most surely will have been worthwhile!