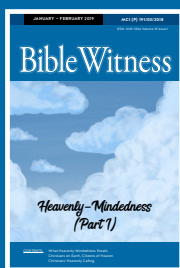


Bible Witness

Heavenly-Mindedness (Part 1)

CONTENTS: What Heavenly-Mindedness Entails
 Christians on Earth, Citizens of Heaven
 Christians' Heavenly Calling

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What HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS Entails

Prabhudas Koshy

Heavenly-mindedness, being unique to Christians, is all about how Christians ought to think and act upon this earth. “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7a). It is a state of spiritual thinking which is totally absent in the worldly, unregenerate people—not because they are not intelligent, but simply because they are not born



of the Spirit. To think in a heavenly-minded fashion is not only strange to them, it is also despicable and provocative to them. That's why Christians are called "strangers" in this world (cf. 1 Peter 2:11). But this is because they do not realise that Christians are pilgrims on earth. Now, a pilgrim is one who does not belong to his current place, but is on a journey to his ultimate destination. We are like travellers moving from one place to another until we get to heaven. We don't look at our days on earth as a treasured memory. We don't go after the things of this earth nor invest our life and soul in this world. We count the things of this world as not valuable; in fact, as dung (cf. Philippians 3:8)!

As Christians, we feel a terrible sense of strangeness in this world, where everything seems to be a mess, insofar as righteousness is concerned. This world is full of moral, spiritual turmoil, as well as emotional, social upheaval everywhere. And we Christians want to fly away to a better place, for we don't feel at home here. That's the kind of mindset that God wants us to have as heaven-bound Christians. Our thoughts and perspective are to be heavenly, not earthly, as corroborated by Colossians 3:1-4—"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

We shall now consider several insights concerning our new perspective as we sojourn here on earth, from the point of regeneration ("if ye then be risen with Christ") to the point of glorification (when "ye also appear with him in glory").

New Life

The opening words of the above passage—"If ye then be risen with Christ" (v. 1a)—clearly indicates that Christians are those who have experienced the new life in Christ. "If" here is not a doubtful assertion, but used in the Greek as a condition of fact. As a means of argument, it's almost like the word "since" in English; in other words, it's a logical assertion that we are risen with Christ. We are truly born again and have the new life in Christ. Salvation or regeneration is divine life given to us, as we are now given that relationship with God. We were far from God, being spiritually dead without salvation. We could not have come out of our deadness because we were powerless and buried under the weight of God's wrath against our sins. A person who is spiritually dead has no power to respond to spiritual things. For "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Just as a physically dead person cannot respond to physical stimuli, a spiritually dead person is unable to respond to spiritual things. An unregenerate man is not merely sick, but dead! But when the Holy Spirit

comes into our heart with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, He awakens us like a dead man coming out of the grave.

This is exactly what the apostle Paul said in an earlier chapter—“And you, being dead in your sins ... hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13). The word “quicken” means “made alive”. Being made alive together with Christ means, first of all, all our sins are removed and all the spiritual deadness is taken away from us through Christ’s redemptive work. Christ has pleased His Father with His atoning sacrifice, so the Father in His great approval of His sacrifice, raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to a place on His right hand on the throne. And that’s where born-again believers now spiritually live—in heavenly places. As such, Christians cannot live according to the thinking, aspirations, and passions of the people of this earth. Since we are risen with Christ spiritually, then we want to be a heavenly person living on this earth, not an earthly person trying to go to heaven. Every other religion is an attempt to get to heaven, but for

Christians, it’s a different thing. Heaven comes to us in Christ. He lifts us up with Him and we are seated spiritually in heavenly places with Christ. That’s our new life as a regenerate person.

New Pursuit

We not only have a new life, we also have a new life of heavenly pursuit, not earthly pursuit. As a heavenly people, we “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (v. 1b). The word “seek” in Greek—*zeteite*—means “to strive earnestly for”. The phrase “which are above” points to all things with reference to Christ’s present exalted state in heaven. Our greatest pursuit is heaven itself and Christ who is sitteth on the right hand of God.

Now, this doesn’t mean that we don’t fulfil our earthly responsibilities, or carry out the work duties in our occupations. It simply means we won’t do anything on this earth without constantly seeking Christ in all these things. If
any of these things

would prevent us from seeking Christ, then we won't take them on. Believers' thoughts must be directed to the exalted Christ. We must be eager to think of Christ as the exalted Christ. We must seek to know what He is directing us to do as our great Redeemer-King, and His will must dominate our minds. We don't follow our agenda. We don't follow the world's agenda. We follow the Lord's agenda. What are the things above that we ought to seek after? First and foremost, it is the exalted Christ Himself whom we must seek; we must think of who He is and what He is doing in heaven for us. Secondly, we must pursue His glory, purpose, and will in heaven here on earth. These objects of our pursuit and affection must be sought as our delight here on earth.

With such a heavenly pursuit, Christians are highly motivated people. We have the life of the resurrected Christ which is a victorious life, for He has defeated sin and the grave. ["O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" we ask triumphantly in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55)!] It is also a vibrant life, for Christ has set our mind focused right where he has ascended to heaven, thus giving us a new pursuit. And that pursuit never keeps us downwards but lifts us upwards. We are not like planes that sit idly on the tarmac. We are rather like a plane whose engines are screaming and pulling the entire structure of the plane across the runway. It is flying, plucking itself up against the gravity of the earth and moving upwards. That's

how every Christian ought to live everyday—ever climbing upwards. That's the Christian pursuit!

New Passion

We who are constantly climbing towards God cannot be said to be people without any affection or passion. But we have to be mindful of what we set our affections on. Paul exhorts, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (v. 2). The word "affection" comes from the Greek word (*phroneo*) which means "direct your mind to something". It has to do with setting your mind in a certain desired direction. A Christian's thoughts should be directed to Christ and the things associated with where He now dwells.

Christians cannot live a life that is disconnected with heaven; our minds must always lay hold on heaven and heavenly things. Our hearts are constantly stirred up by the Holy Spirit and the Word to think of our Christ in heaven. Here on earth, our lives are not detached from heaven. The matters of heaven are dear to us, and hence our most cherished thoughts. We are so fascinated with heaven that we are happy to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Heaven should become our preoccupation as we sojourn on this earth, for "our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). The Greek word translated as "conversation" means "conduct of life", not just communication. It goes without

saying that our preoccupations of mind, desires of heart and convictions of soul will manifest themselves in our outward conduct. What we do, how we do things, how we relate to and deal with others, all stem from our heart's passions, for Scripture tells us, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

While we are exhorted to be heavenly-minded, we are also cautioned not to be earthly-minded. Our affections should not be placed on wealth and health, houses and lands, worldly honour and pleasures. Neither should our passions be the worldly fashions and corrupting entertainments of this world. Worldly lust must be denied. We cannot allow these things to occupy us. These things are of the world—"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof" (1 John 2:17a). We rather desire lasting things—"but he that doeth the will of God (i.e. passionately minding and pursuing heaven) abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17b). In fact, the great object of our contemplation should be the celestial city that Jesus is preparing for us. Readiness for that final home must be our greatest passion on earth!

New Destination

Unquestionably, our words, our conduct, and our actions all declare whether we are occupied with heaven or not. As a heavenly-minded people, we always must remember we have a new destination—that celestial city Jesus is preparing for us. This world is not a place we are going

to stay; we are just passing through. And that's the main focus in vv. 3-4, where Paul says, "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

A Christian is dead to sin, and his life is now "hid with Christ in God". The word "hid" implies concealment, safety and security. We are concealed, yea *wrapped*, in the life of Christ. The exalted Christ surrounds, keeps and secures us for Himself. Though the Christian is not yet in heaven, he is secure and safe in Christ. Oh, what blessed joy! We shall never be lost or abandoned in this world. There is no shadow of doubt as to whether we will be in heaven when Jesus comes to bring us there. It is because "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory". Christ will make sure you appear in His presence, whether at death or at the Rapture. But this assurance cannot be yours if your life isn't hidden in Christ. If you are wrapped up in earthly passion and earthly pursuit, being still dead to Christ but alive to the world, then this glorious heavenly destiny (and destination) is not yours.

But if, by the grace of God, you have already experienced that new life which constantly teaches you to pursue heaven with spiritual fervour and passion, looking unto Christ (the Author and Finisher of your faith), then heaven becomes your heartbeat and fascination. And when you are moving in that direction towards that heavenly destination, when Christ comes

again, you will appear before Him. Christians, fear not even when that saddest and most perplexing situation in life, namely death, occurs. For sure, though it's only a temporary separation, it brings sadness and is always a painful thing when the coffin is lowered into the grave. Notwithstanding, when the Rapture happens, you will appear with Him; even though you were dead and buried, you shall be there with Him in glory (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)! Indeed, as the apostle John assures us, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

So, every Christian should look upward to heaven where Christ reigns, and also forward to His return in the clouds. A Christian's life on earth shall always be onward, forward, upward! ♦

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9. Let Jesus Come into Your Heart
10. Christ Returneth!

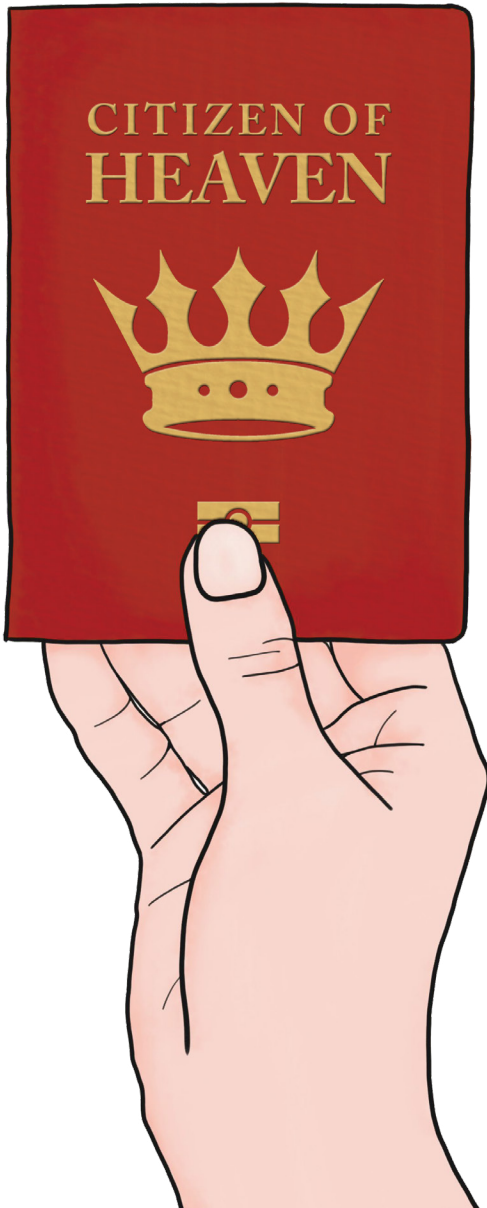
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CHRISTIANS ON EARTH, CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

Prabhudas Koshy

To be a Christian is to be exalted or promoted to heavenly realms. When the Lord saves us, He has done everything to lift us up to the heavenly realm. Nothing stands between us and heaven itself. Straightaway, we belong to heaven. While heaven is a place where we believers are all going to be when we leave this earth, it is more than just a city. The outstanding thought about heaven is not its physical locality, but its



Occupant and spiritual blessings. It is where God is and where the Lord's fullness is fully seen. That being the case, we do not have to wait till the end of our lives to enjoy heaven. Scripture reveals to us that upon salvation, we are blessed with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Christians on earth are not burgesses of this world and its cities. Whether we live or die, we belong to heaven. We are heavenly citizens. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Hence, in all the spiritual struggles that we face as Christians living on this earth, oftentimes hindered and troubled by the efforts of Satan and the world, we must constantly remember and be assured of our transformed status as believers: Christians on earth are actually citizens of heaven.

Fellow Members of the Household of God

In the above passage, the apostle Paul was talking about Christians in Ephesus who, having come from different racial groups, needed to be assured that there is no division in the church anymore. No more such thought as: “You are a Gentile, I am a Jew.” In the church, all believers are the same; they are all children of God. Christians, though of Gentile or even heathen background, are “now therefore ... no more strangers and foreigners”—they are no more outcasts or guests who come by, but are “fellowcitizens with the saints”, i.e. one with all the saints.

Now, we must realise that not all saints are here on earth. In fact, the phrase here, “with the saints”, is a reference to saints of the past and the present. In other words, they include saints who have already gone to heaven, as hinted by the expression “of the household of God” in v. 19. Certainly, the household of God includes saints of the past, saints of the present, and saints that are yet to come into God’s kingdom. As part of a heaven-bound people, we are not separated from them who are in heaven. When we come together as a church in worship, our coming together is in fellowship with all the saints of God, forming a household of God. This is known in theological language as the *universal church*. And so when members of local churches gather together in a visible way in respective localities, they are seen as fellow citizens of God’s household, which is heaven itself. This is

corroborated by Philippians 3:20, where we are told that “our conversation (i.e. a citizen’s conduct) is in heaven”.

Dear Christian, do you realise that we believers are the only citizens of heaven now on earth? Now, that’s an awesome statement! When we begin to grasp the extent of this concept, we will not move around as though we are not in heaven yet or unsure whether we will ever get there. Our citizenship in heaven is sealed as soon as the Lord raised us from our spiritual deadness and gave us His spiritual life. We are heaven’s citizens here on earth! So when we come together every Lord’s Day and whenever opportunity arises, it’s like coming together to heaven itself; it’s the kingdom of God on earth. We being “of the household of God”, we know we are to be together forever in heaven. Our coming together affirms our going to heaven. Notwithstanding the fact that the church is sometimes infiltrated by unbelievers, pretenders, hypocrites, etc., you could say, ‘Church is a little heaven on earth.’ We do well to remember that the church is a type of heaven, where we shall soon live together as the household of God forever.

Fellow Citizens with the Saints

Incidentally, when we go to heaven, we are going to dwell in that heavenly city together with another group of God’s creatures—the angels! In the Bible, the word “saints” can sometimes point to angels. Thus in heaven, apart from our

Triune God, there are two kinds of saintly, holy creatures, namely the angels and the redeemed community of mankind. So when Paul majestically proclaims that we are “fellowcitizens with the saints”, it is really a depiction of all the saints of God through the Lord Jesus Christ and the myriads of angels up in heaven.

This point is not without biblical basis. In Hebrews 12:22, we read that when saints on earth gather to worship God, they are “come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels”. Congregating believers are told that they have come unto Mount Zion, which is a figure of the heavenly Jerusalem. Now, in the mind of God’s people, Mount Zion was a type of the new Jerusalem, which is another name for heaven. And it was used by Paul to talk about the gathering of the saints to worship God. As the expression here is used to refer to the assembling of God’s people on earth, it follows that when we as a church come together (be it in Singapore, or Malaysia, or in other parts of the earth), we all as believers gather together unto that heavenly Jerusalem, whereby our souls are now directed to heaven where the Lord is.

Note the writer’s further progression of thought here. Whenever God’s people come together, they not only come with the knowledge that they come before the King of heaven in His city, they also come “to an innumerable company of angels” (v. 22b). The Greek word here literally

means “myriads” of angels. The writer of Hebrews seems to be saying, ‘Brethren, when we get together as God’s people, we are fellow citizens of heaven together with the angels!’ It is almost like the angels are here with us. In fact, Scripture reveals that God sends them forth to minister to us (cf. Hebrews 1:14). But more than that, it is staggering to know that when we come together to worship God, all the angels also gather to worship! No matter where they go, they are always heavenly-minded and worshipful of God. Saints on earth, being in that majestic company and as fellow worshippers of God, must likewise do so. So, in all our gatherings and Christian service here on earth, we must remember that we do so as heavenly, not earthly, citizens. Only then can it be congruent with Christians on earth being pictured as fellow citizens together with the myriads of angels and all glorified saints.

Dwellers in Heavenly Places with Christ

One more astounding truth concerning our heavenly citizenship: Paul says in Ephesians 2:4-6 that “God, who is rich in mercy ... hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”.

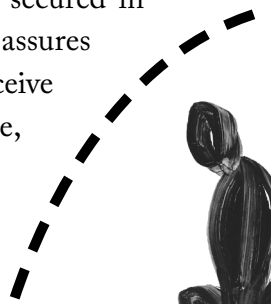
The direct result of salvation is to be raised up with Christ, and to be seated with Him in the heavenly places. We are made alive spiritually from our

spiritual deadness, that we may enjoy His exaltation and share in His preeminent glory in heaven. Christians should not ‘get stuck’ in the sinful world here on earth. A little illustration will suffice to emphasise this point. You remember that when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He did not leave him as he was. It is not possible for a living person to function while he is wrapped in grave clothes. Jesus commanded those around to “loose him, and let him go” (John 11:44b). Only then could Lazarus be allowed to move with Christ out of that graveyard. Similarly, if you are a true believer, you are no longer wrapped in the clutches of spiritual deadness. You are freed in such a way that you do not want to have anything to do with this stinking grave of unregenerate people. We rather want to breathe in the air of heaven, which we are able to, for Christ has sent His Holy Spirit from heaven to breathe into us all the spiritual life and blessings. That divine heavenly Comforter and His truth have caused our thoughts to be drawn up into heavenly realities.

We are no longer of this present world, living in its sinful and rebellious ways. We are now heirs of spiritual life in Christ Jesus, and live daily with Him in the “heavenly places”. By “heavenly places”, Paul is referring to that heavenly realm where Christ rules with His Father. It is that supernatural sphere where all the spiritual blessings of God are made available for us. These heavenly places are no more an inaccessible place for us. Heaven is our real experience, though we

are not there yet in a physical sense. This reality is affirmed by the Greek aorist tense of the verb translated as “made to sit”, which denotes an action done once and for all. The aorist tense here means that it is not a promise waiting to be—but that is already—fulfilled. It emphasises the absoluteness of our elevated heavenly status by speaking of it as if it had already fully taken place. Because of Jesus (not our own goodness), we are now dwellers in heavenly places with Christ.

That is where our spiritual blessings are, and where we have fellowship with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and with all the saints who have gone before (and will go after) us. That is where all our life’s commands, purposes, and perspective come from, and where all our praise and petitions go. That’s where we want to spend our time every day. We do not want to walk on this earth without having that close communion with heaven itself! We walk on this earth with heaven upon our minds, not with earthly pleasures and earthly burdens preoccupying our minds. That’s what Christian life is, and that’s how we escape earthliness. Everything we see on this earth has to be analysed from the higher perspective of heaven; never look at them from this low place of earth. May we constantly be so connected to heaven that no matter what happens in this world, we know our inheritance is secured in heaven. Indeed, Scripture assures us that someday we will receive the “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that



fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for [us]" (1 Peter 1:4).

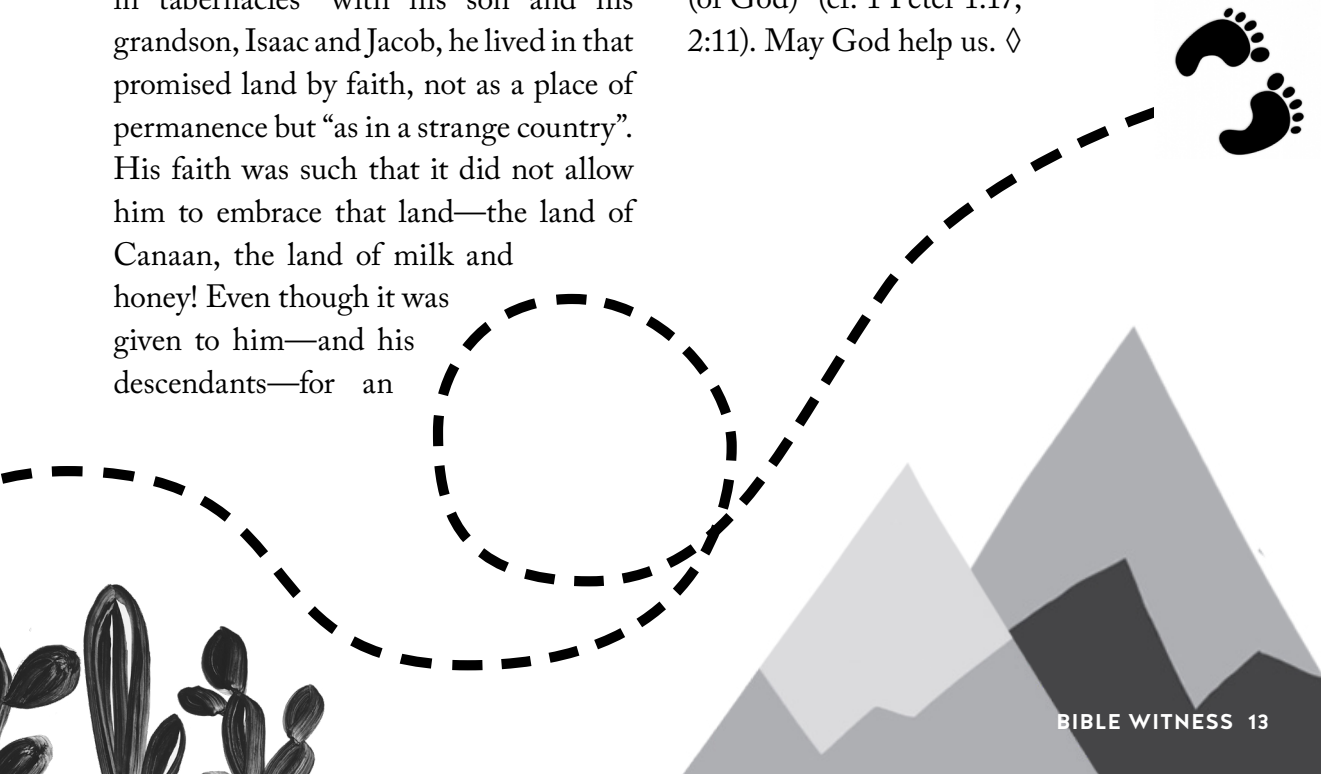
Heavenly Citizens Sojourning as Strangers on Earth

As citizens of heaven, we look at earthly things as temporal and fleeting, while at heavenly things as glorious and lasting. How then should heavenly people live while on this earth? Well, just look at how the patriarchs of old lived. Take Abraham as an example: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9-10).

Now, this verse is very instructive. God had promised this land for Abraham and his descendants. Yet, "dwelling in tabernacles" with his son and his grandson, Isaac and Jacob, he lived in that promised land by faith, not as a place of permanence but "as in a strange country". His faith was such that it did not allow him to embrace that land—the land of Canaan, the land of milk and honey! Even though it was given to him—and his descendants—for an

inheritance, his faith in Christ meant that he was never at ease with this place. Moreover, we see that Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations". With spiritual enlightenment from the Holy Spirit, he realised that all the cities on earth have no foundations. He was not too excited just because the country he lived in was a fertile land. He knew no city on this earth is forever; they will all collapse with time. And so he looked for a city that is made with the hand of God, "whose builder and maker is God", whereby he could enjoy eternity with Him.

Dear church of Jesus Christ, as the redeemed community of God's people here on earth, never think of ourselves any more as earthly people, but as heavenly citizens. Christians should never live as if they were permanent residents of this earth, but (as the apostle Peter aptly put it) as "strangers and pilgrims", who "pass the time of your sojourning here in fear (of God)" (cf. 1 Peter 1:17; 2:11). May God help us. ◇



Christians' HEAVENLY CALLING

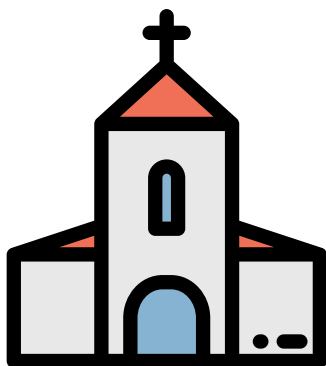
Prabhudas Koshy

Christians — A Called People

Christians are a called people; their gathering together is known as “church”—*ekklēsia* in the original Greek, which means “called-out ones”. This is an apt label as the church is indeed made up of those who are called out of the world by God unto Himself and unto heaven. Hence, we read of Paul referring to the church in Rome as “the called of Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:6) and “beloved of God, called to be saints” (Romans 1:7). This calling from God also brings Christians into an unbreakable relationship with God, for they have been “called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Christians’ calling directs them to live a holy life. They are not only “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2), but are also instructed that “God hath not called [them] unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7). It further behoves Christians to remember always that God “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace” (2 Timothy 1:9).

Clearly, the above-mentioned Scriptural verses from Paul’s epistles tell us that it was characteristic of the apostle Paul to depict Christians as being “called”. In fact, his epistles are replete with other such references (cf. Romans 8:28, 30; 1 Corinthians 1:24, 26; 5:11; 7:15, 17-18, 20-22, 24; Galatians 1:6; 5:13; Ephesians 1:18; 4:1, 4; Colossians 3:15; Philippians 3:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 2:14; 1 Timothy 6:12; Hebrews 3:1). Paul is not alone. The apostle Peter also spoke of Christians as a people with a calling (cf. 1 Peter 1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10; 2 Peter 1:3, 10).



Heavenly Source of Christians’ Calling

Hebrews 3:1 refers to Christians as “partakers of the heavenly calling”. What is that heavenly calling? It is not the divine summoning which Christians receive at the end of their earthly lives to enter their celestial home. Rather, it is the divine call issued to sinful men to come out of their spiritual darkness and judgment into the light of salvation and the joy of heaven. Note

that Christians are not here *exhorted* to partake of the heavenly calling, but are *assured* that they are its partakers. This heavenly calling is extended to them through the preaching of the Gospel. This truth is expressed by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:14—“Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Through the Gospel, they are given a heavenly calling to follow. The Gospel is an invitation to sinners on earth from the God of heaven to put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that they may become partakers of the heaven that He has prepared. Christians have this blessed assurance about heaven because the Gospel that they have trusted in is a heavenly calling given to them.

Why is Christians’ calling referred to as a “heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3:1a)? Because it comes from heaven! The call comes from God Himself, and not from within oneself (by one’s own intention and plan) or from any human institution. Even the church and pastors are not the source of Christians’ calling, though they are the means that God would often use to provide the Gospel call. Man’s part is to become a co-operator by responding to the call in faith and obedience. The God of heaven alone is the source of our salvation. He authored our salvation and beckoned us to be partakers of it.

Hence, Christians are “partakers of the heavenly calling”, not producers of their spiritual life and pursuit. They come to Him to receive and enjoy His heavenly

calling. If God had not called them, they would never have been partakers of the hope of heaven. As partakers of the heavenly calling, Christians are endowed with all its heavenly privileges, purposes and prerogatives. Praise God, all the privileges and purposes of God revealed through the Gospel of Christ now belong to Christians to enjoy. Consequently, Christians ought to live for heavenly realities which are made available to them through Christ. We Christians are not to be entrapped in an earthly, ritualistic kind of meaningless religious life—we have heavenly realities to partake of and live for.

Heavenly Superiority of Christians’ Calling

Oh, what supreme blessings do Christians partake because of their calling! No wonder the Christian’s calling is very highly esteemed in the Scriptures, being described with superlative adjectives. It is rightfully presented as “an holy calling” by which God “hath saved us, and called us with” (2 Timothy 1:9). It is also assiduously desired as a special “prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” to press towards (Philippians 3:14). Such adjectives as “holy” and “high” point not only to the heavenly nature, but also to the heavenly superiority of the Christian’s calling.

Incidentally, in the Book of Hebrews, the word “heavenly” is a recurring theme. Besides the “heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3:1), the writer of Hebrews speaks of the “heavenly gift” (Hebrews 6:4), the

“sanctuary” that is heavenly, “which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Hebrews 8:2), the “heavenly things” (Hebrews 9:23), a “country” that is “heavenly” (Hebrews 11:16), and the “heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22). In all those cases, the “heavenly” is presented not only in contrast with, but also as superior to, the earthly. If the heavenly call is understood in the same sense, it must then mean it is a calling which has a spiritual and not a material direction, certainly far better than all that is earthly. Christians’ heavenly calling emphasises its superiority over all other persuasions and teachings in this world, especially that of the legalistic Jews of Paul’s day. It is no surprise that the epistle to the Hebrews cautioned its readers against the insistence of the bigoted, misguided Judaizers that ceremonialism is necessary for salvation. Christians who believed in the Gospel had no reason to defer to the Judaizers’ insistence on the keeping of Levitical ordinances because they were already partakers of the heavenly calling! The Gospel call given to them from heaven will certainly bring them to heaven. The Gospel call which proceeds from heaven guarantees the heavenly inheritance of all who receive it by faith.

Just as the source of Christians’ calling is heaven, the destiny and ultimate destination to which that calling directs is also heaven—that’s why it is called the heavenly calling! Matthew Henry, in his commentary on Hebrews 3:1, describes the heavenly calling as “that calling which brings down heaven into the souls

of men, raises them to a heavenly temper and conversation, and prepares them to live forever with God in heaven.” As partakers of the heavenly calling, we Christians can now live daily in the knowledge of the reality of such superior, glorious heavenly calling, whereby we have the honour and power to enjoy the realities of heaven which are now made available to us by God through Christ. It thus follows that we are now “blessed ... with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3), and are “made [to] sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). It would not be off the mark to say that Christians’ heavenly calling is a calling to inherit all the rights and privileges granted to all who have been raised to the heavenly places. Even though we are presently living in the ‘foreign’, hostile land of this earth, we are assuredly provided with all the promises of spiritual (even supernatural) blessings of heaven.

It goes without saying that this heavenly calling assures us of spiritual blessings which are far superior to all that this world can offer, and are sufficient to help us through all the temptations and trials of our life on earth till we are ushered into God’s glorious presence in heaven. Every Christian, by virtue of his heavenly calling, would thus be led to “walk worthy of the vocation (or calling) wherewith [he is] called” (Ephesians 4:1b), and thereby should mind spiritual and heavenly things as the principal things of his life! To God be the glory. Amen. ◇

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Bible Trivia — Numbers 1

Sarah Yong

In Numbers 1, “the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation ... in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt” (v. 1), and commanded Moses to take a census of the Israelites by their tribes. In particular, He commanded Moses and Aaron to determine the number of males, 20 years old and upward, who would be able to go forth to war (vv. 2-3).

A. Read this chapter from your Bible, and then complete the table below by filling in the missing tribe, head of tribe or number respectively.

	Tribe	Head of Tribe	Men 20 years old & above
1)	Reuben		46,500
2)	Simeon	Shelumiel	
3)	Judah		
4)		Nethaneel	54,400
5)	Zebulun		57,400
6)	Ephraim		
7)	Manasseh		
8)	Benjamin	Abidan	
9)		Ahiezer	62,700
10)	Asher	Pagiel	
11)	Gad	Eliasaph	
12)		Ahira	
Total number of men 20 years old and upwards			

B. Numbers 1 tells us that there was one special tribe that was not numbered as they were not required to go to war.

1. Name the tribe that was not numbered: _____
2. Instead, they were given the task of keeping charge of the t_____ of t_____.

John Calvin

(1509 - 1564)

Theologian of the Reformation

Part III

(Retold from "A Glimpse of the Life and Works of John Calvin" by Timothy Tow, published by Christian Life Publishers, Singapore;

"This Was John Calvin" by Thea B. Van Halsema, published by Baker Book House for I.O.E.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan;

"Heroes of the Reformation" by F.G. Llewellyn, published by Gospel Press, London, Great Britain;

"Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History" by Richard M. Hannula, published by Canon Press, Moscow, Idaho)

Retold by Jenny Lok

Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

By September 1536, Calvin was actively engaged in teaching the Scriptures in Geneva. He was given the respectable title of "Professor of Sacred Letters". At the same time, he continued his work of revising the *Institutes*. However, to Calvin's sadness, anger and disappointment, he soon discovered that the people of Geneva were still living a sinful life of drinking, gambling and dancing. Unfaithfulness and immoral behaviour were also widespread among the men in the city. Thus, Calvin began to preach strongly against all these vices. His desire was for the people to turn away from their wickedness to lead a holy life unto God.

In late September 1536, both Calvin and Farel travelled to Lausanne, east of Geneva, for a series of religious debates between the Reformers and representatives of the Roman Church. During one of the debates, a speaker for the Roman Church stated that the body of Christ was actually present in the Holy Communion. He accused the Protestants of not obeying the teachings of the early church fathers on this matter. Calvin knew that this was far from the truth, for throughout his years of studies in Paris, he had learned much through the writings of the ancient church fathers concerning the Holy Communion. So without great difficulty, he put forth his case and won the debate of the day. Amazingly, Calvin was so eloquent and convincing that even a Franciscan monk, named John Tandy, confessed his ignorance and asked for forgiveness before he publicly announced that he would give up the wrong teachings of the Roman Church. The outcome was that 120



priests and 80 monks turned to the Protestant faith! What a victory for the Reformers in Lausanne!

Following this, Calvin continued to preach every day and faithfully attended to the needs of the people. In November 1536, in order to organise the church in Geneva, Calvin came up with a “Confession of Faith and Discipline”, as well as a Catechism (to help parents teach God’s truths to children), which were approved by the City Council. Other suggested reforms included having the Lord’s Supper once a month, encouraging the singing of Psalms, instruction of children, among others. In all that he did, Calvin always stressed “God’s sovereignty over all things and His love and mercy for His children”. Geneva was transformed! Many turned to Christ. Instead of swearing, fighting and engaging in drinking and gambling, many loved to pray and sing Psalms. The poor and needy were cared for as homes, schools and hospitals were built in the city.



(John Calvin debating)

Nevertheless, there was a group of godless people known as the “Libertines”, who hated Calvin and his teachings because they loved to live as they pleased. The more Calvin preached against sin, the more these Libertines wanted to taunt and threaten him with their shouting and gunshots. Oh, how the peace-loving and godly Calvin had to put up with such rebellious and aggressive behaviour! Farel, his fellow labourer, was not spared either.

Everything soon came to a head on an Easter Sunday afternoon service. Calvin preached from the pulpit of St Peter’s Cathedral, saying, “God has brought us into this family...He gives us food to nourish us. Therefore through His Son, He gives us the bread and wine, the life-giving body and blood of Christ.” He added, “But, this spiritual food is turned into deadly poison for those who partake unworthily, casting them down to greater ruin.” At the end of the sermon, he said, “I will not give the bread and wine to anyone whom the church has forbidden to receive it, and woe to any who tries to take it by force.” Upon hearing that, the Libertines, shouting and brandishing their swords, rushed forward and demanded to partake in the Lord’s Supper. Calvin stood firm and, with tremendous courage, spoke to the unruly Libertines, looking at them in the eye: “You may break these arms, and you may take my life, but you will never force me to defile the table of the Lord.” With that, the Libertines turned red in embarrassment and retreated. Thus, the Lord’s Supper was kept with much holy fear and reverence.

Right after the clash with the Libertines, the Geneva Council met and decided that Calvin and Farel must leave Geneva within three days. Calvin’s reply to this was: “Well and good. If we had served men, we

would have been ill-requited (badly rewarded), but we serve a good Master who will reward us.”

On 25 April 1538, both Calvin and Farel left Geneva on horseback amidst a storm, travelling 25 miles to Basel. After a short respite in Basel, both parted ways – Farel to Neuchatel, his former pastorate, and Calvin to Strasburg. Less than 5 months later in early September, Calvin arrived in Strasburg, Germany. It was a peaceful city which embraced the Reformed faith. Calvin was asked to pastor a group of French refugees who had escaped from persecution in France. For the next 3 years in Strasburg, life was “like a pleasant dream compared to the horrors of Geneva”. To Calvin, it was such a breeze to preach to those French refugees who cherished their Reformed faith and were always eager to listen to him in their own language. At last, Calvin could walk in the streets without fear of being attacked by any rebellious group.

For a period of time, Calvin lived in the house of Dr Martin Bucer, the pastor of a small church named Saint Thomas. Bucer proved to be a caring and hospitable man, and Calvin enjoyed working with him. As a pastor, Calvin kept himself busy with preaching, visitation and writing. His



(Martin Luther writing to Bucer on John Calvin)

church was much more disciplined than the one in Geneva. There were also deacons trained to help him in his pastoral ministry. According to him, "No house, no society, can exist without order and discipline, much less the church." Many Anabaptists were converted and allowed their infants to be baptised. As Calvin laboured diligently in Strasburg, the Lord prospered him. Very soon, he became a much respected pastor among its citizens.

However, in Geneva, things were different. In the absence of Calvin, a "grievous wolf" (cf. Acts 20:29) appeared on the scene. He was Cardinal Sadolet, an eloquent but crafty man who tried to sow seeds of doubt on the good character and intentions of the Reformers, urging the people of Geneva to return to the Roman fold. In his written response, Calvin used God's Word to destroy all arguments of the evil Sadolet and this was read by many, including Martin Luther in Wittenburg, Germany. Luther commented, "Here is a writing which has hands and feet. I rejoice that God raises such men. They will continue what I have begun against Antichrist, and by the help of God, they will complete it." Much as Calvin would desire it, both he and Luther never had a face-to-face meeting, leading Calvin to lament: "O, if I could fly towards thee and enjoy thy society, if only for a few hours!"

In October 1539, Calvin published his public lectures on the Book of Romans, "the first and one of the finest of his many commentaries". To help the believers understand the doctrine of the Holy Communion, Calvin published his "Little Treatise on the Holy Supper of Our Lord". Busy as he was, Calvin was often reminded by Bucer to look for a bride. Perhaps it was time for him to marry and enjoy marital bliss, just like his friend Bucer who was married with six bubbly children. Calvin was clear in his mind that he would not go for just a pretty face but more importantly, his future wife must be "chaste, not too nice or fastidious (difficult to please), economical (thrifty), patient, and likely to take care of [his] health".

Indeed, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Calvin found his wife – among the French refugees in his congregation! She was Idelette de Bure, widow of Jean Stordeur (an Anabaptist), who was converted under Calvin's preaching. They were married in August 1540.

(To be continued...)

Credits for the Children's Story's images:

John Calvin debating (p. 21): <https://www.naphtali.com/articles/chris-coldwell/john-calvin-and-holy-days/>

John Calvin reading (p. 22): <https://calvin500blog.wordpress.com/2008/07/12/john-calvin-on-piety-part-one/>

Martin Luther writing (p. 22): Original illustration from Martin Luther by Gustav Freytag, published by The Open Court Publishing Company, 1897

TESTIMONIES

from Bible Witness Media Ministry's

TURKEY-ISRAEL

Bible Study Tour 2018

Siew Lian: Chip Hung and I have wanted to visit the Holy Land at least once during our lifetime. Instead of travelling somewhere to celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary this year, we thought it is most meaningful to travel with God's people to the Holy land. So, we signed up for the Turkey-Israel trip without hesitation.

We are thankful that God has kept Pastor Koshy in good health throughout this study tour. Indeed, he is the best person to link up all that we have learned through the study of God's Word, especially the book of Revelation.

How blessed to be able to see the Bible comes alive through this trip. Matching biblical accounts to the evidence revealed in the various historical sites just keep us marvelling at God's sovereignty and His wondrous work of creation. One unforgettable highlight was the visit to Nazareth Village. There we were made aware of the process of the olive press, whereby its relation to Christ's agony and

sufferings helps me recognise how much He loves me and therefore deserves my wholehearted devotion.

It is good to visit Israel with brethren of the same faith as we have the same focus. We were further blessed with getting to know our brethren better as we journeyed, dined, visited places, shopped and cared for one another. Moreover, we were blessed to have Pastor expound God's Word in relation to our visits and to encourage us in our Christian walk.

I am thankful that God has kept all of us healthy and safe throughout. Thank God for giving Pastor and Dn Lok wisdom to oversee the itinerary and at times rescheduling to suit the weather and achieve the best benefits of the visits. Thank God for blessing us with this holy land trip. "Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good" (Psalm 122:9).

Marcus Chee: I praise and thank God for a blessed time of learning, spiritual

growth and sweet fellowship during the Turkey-Israel Bible Study Tour. Thank God that my family and I were given the opportunity to participate in this trip, and for the rest, safety and health given to the group throughout our travellings.

Initially, I thought that this trip was just like any other tour. However, as the days went by, the events and places of the Bible slowly became clearer, and more alive and real to me. With Pastor Koshy's daily exhortations from the Bible and historical reminders from the ruins of the "seven churches" of Revelation, I was able to see deeper meanings beyond mere holidaying and physical enjoyment. The spiritual learning gained is truly likened to a two-week church camp with real-life demonstrations and examples.

Through this trip, I was reminded of God's warning to the "seven churches". Though some were commended and most rebuked, all of them ended up in the same plight – as ruins. One of the major lessons I learned during this trip was regarding the danger of complacency and pride in spiritual life. As demonstrated by these ruins, churches which remain unrepentant will end up spiritually dead. All praise to God for a wonderful trip!

Alice Chee: For many years I had wanted to visit Israel. The land in which our Lord Jesus once trod when He was on earth. Thank God by His providence, my family and I were able to join this Turkey-Israel Bible Study Tour organised by Bible Witness. Thank God

for enabling Pastor and Dn Lok to work on it and make this trip possible.

We first went to Turkey to visit the sites of the "seven churches", namely Ephesus (Kuşadası), Smyrna (Izmir), Pergamos (Bergama), Thyatira (Akhissar), Sardis, Philadelphia (Alaşehir) and Laodicea. Sadly, all the churches are now gone. The gospel work, which the apostles and early Christians once risked their life to build, were nowhere to be seen.

As we walked through the ruins of the ancient cities—the theatres, temples of ancient gods and goddesses, churches—we could still see the beauty and splendour of each architectural remain. The people who built it must be amazingly brilliant and powerful, yet they are all gone. As the psalmist says, "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (Psalm 103:15-16). Truly, man is like grass and we soon wither away.

After visiting the historical sites of the 7 churches, we came to the Holy Land—Israel. The thought of me stepping on the land, where our precious Lord Jesus once lived in and where He will one day rule over the world, thrills my soul! As we visited the places of the Bible, I was excited and encouraged as the Bible became alive to me; yet at the same time, I was much saddened to see that most of the holy sites were over taken by the Roman Catholic Church.

My faith is much strengthened after the trip. During one of the devotions, Pastor Koshy exhorted us to fervently proclaim His words. I am resolved to try, for I know that “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8). May the Lord give me courage and strength to proclaim His words.

Jonah Tan: First of all, I want to thank God that my family and I could participate in the Turkey-Israel Bible Study Tour. I also want to thank God for enabling me to learn about the land where Jesus lived and ministered. I was particularly struck by how far Jesus and His disciples would have to walk without transportation then. We visited the site where Jesus was supposedly baptised. We also went to the “seven churches” of Revelation: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea – and got to know the “stories” behind all the 7 churches.

I also thank God for controlling the weather for us. It was raining during one trip. While we were on the way to our scheduled destinations, God stopped the rain and showed us a rainbow! This reminded me of what I had learnt in the Revelation class – “And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald” (Revelation 4:3).

If there is another Bible Study Tour, I would surely like to go again!

Jovial Tan: First of all, I would like to thank God that my family and I were able to attend this Turkey-Israel Bible Study Tour. This trip to the Holy Land has deepened my geographical knowledge of the places mentioned in the Bible, even though they have changed drastically after 2,000 years. Now I am able to visualise what I read in the Bible.

The trip to the “seven churches” truly makes me marvel at how people of the ancient times moved the gigantic marble pieces and large stones. Unfortunately, all these churches (whether good or lukewarm) have been destroyed by natural disasters. Even Smyrna and Philadelphia, which God has praised, were destroyed when their love for God diminished. Therefore, I must continue to fear God, feed myself with God’s Word and put it into action every day. I must also serve Christ even more diligently and fervently. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

In closing, I would also like to thank God for the sweet fellowship with the brethren from other churches, that I am able to make new friends in Christ, as well as foster a closer friendship with the brethren from Gethsemane!

All glory be to Christ!

Cornelius Koshy: All praise to God for these two weeks of daily learning in the Bible lands – to be in places where my eyes

can see for myself the hills and valleys, the upper and lower cities, the trees and the fruits, the animals and the food, the people and the language, the architecture and the pillars, the synagogues and the temples, the gardens and the tunnels – and to have these all understood in relation to biblical events, which were in no way fictitious or mythical, but were experienced by real people. Some of these people died for the glory of the Gospel, and many others sacrificed and devoted their entire lives for the glory of God.

Though distanced from these events and people of the Old and New Testaments by time, culture and language, yet my Lord and Saviour (whom these people of old loved and also served), is the same. He transcends time and space. He remains the same though enormous edifices collapsed to the ground, the earth opened and new valleys formed, and though entire cities vanished and new ones arose – my God and His Truth remain the same.

What were the glories of these cities? They all became dust. What is the glory of man? It is like the flower of the grass. “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:24-25).

My heart is grateful beyond words. I was already so satisfied after the Turkey

leg of our trip, and as our study tour of Israel came to an end, my cup runneth over! Physical blessings are numerous, and so are the spiritual lessons. I thank God for devotions and study sessions that we had every day to ground our visits in the Word of God, and to reflect upon the spiritual lessons – the most outstanding one being the challenge to hold on to the spiritual fort which the past generations have fought strongly for. He only can sustain. But I must do my part.

I thank God for the tour guides that were appointed to us, for the educational information we have learnt from them. I thank God for His daily provisions, which were much more than daily bread; for safety on the road and on rocks as we walked. I thank God for sweet Christian fellowship and laughter. As with all spiritual trips and church camps, this study tour has been a spiritual revival for me. May we all who have been there continue to love the Lord wholeheartedly and to serve Him with our lives. From the older ones in their evening years to the younger ones (like me), may each one do his sacrificial part, that the glorious Gospel will remain in us, and be spread to the whole world. ◇

The Turkey-Israel Bible Study Tour 2018 was organised by Bible Witness Media Ministry, and was held from 26th November 2018 to 7th December 2018. More testimonies will be published in the future.



In Turkey

Turkey-Israel Bible Study Tour 2018



In Israel