

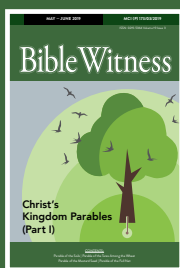
Bible Witness

Christ's Kingdom Parables (Part I)



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Parable of the Soils | Parable of the Tares Among the Wheat
Parable of the Mustard Seed | Parable of the Net



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Parable of the Soils

MATTHEW 13:3b-8; 19-23

Prabhudas Koshy



Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher Himself, taught many wonderful truths of His kingdom by means of parables. Parables are stories taken from the familiar settings of daily life in order to teach the spiritual realities of Christ's heavenly kingdom. They are earthly stories that help us to have a clearer perception of spiritual truths. Nowhere else in the Gospels do we have so many parables of Christ assembled together as in this (13th) chapter of Matthew, the first of which is this parable under consideration.

Communication of Divine Truth Likened to Sowing of Seed

This first parable (as recorded in Matthew 13:3b-8; cf. Mark 4:3-8; Luke 8:5-8) is deliberately chosen as the first to be put forth by Christ, as implicitly declared by Christ Himself. "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" (Mark 4:13). Evidently, it is the fundamental and foundational one upon whose proper understanding hinges the correct understanding of all other

parables to follow. It was taken from the agricultural scene of the land. It is about sowing, a very familiar activity to the people of Jesus' time, especially those living around the Galilee region, where farming, sowing, reaping were all common sights. It is interesting to note the emphasis Jesus is giving in the story itself. He is not talking about different kinds of seeds, nor about different kinds of sowers. The emphasis is on the differing grounds. The type of soil where the seed is falling matters, as manifested by the resultant growth, or the lack of it, that comes forth from the different grounds. This article seeks to capture that emphasis which Jesus makes about the different kinds of ground, hence the title: "Parable of the Soils".

Now, it is instructive to note, right at the outset, that Jesus had gone "out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables" (Matthew 13:1-3a). Here, surrounded by the scenic beauty of that famous inland lake (Sea of Galilee), Jesus could easily have noticed, as he gazed into the distance, a farmer scattering his seed on his plot of farmland. Jesus was not telling them an unfamiliar story, though the thrust of the story points to the reality of spiritual experiences, principles and truths that were unfamiliar to most. We have here Christ uttering that which is mundane and yet, at the same time, addressing that which is more profound in life.

The truth Jesus communicated is likened to the seed sown. Doctrinal

truths are like seeds, able to take root in the hearts and minds of those who hear them. God's Word is factual and accurate, thereby "making wise the simple", "enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:7b, 8b); it is also life-giving, quick and powerful. As "incorruptible seed" (cf. 1 Peter 1:23a), it has potent life and power packed within it, waiting to germinate, blossom and flourish when received by receptive hearts. The Word is capable of "converting the soul", "rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:7a, 8a), and sanctifying our whole being! Indeed, the words of divine truth can transform hearts and cause men to be translated into the kingdom of God, "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23).

Varying Receptivity of Men's Hearts Likened to Different Soils

Let's take a closer look at this parable. "Behold, a sower went forth to sow" (v. 3b). The sower must have been carrying a bag full of seed, ready to sow. While the seed sown represented "the word of the kingdom" (v. 19a), "which by the gospel is preached unto (men)" (1 Peter 1:25b), the different soils portray the hearts of men. Here, four different grounds are depicted.

The Way Side

"And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up" (v. 4). Now, this situation seems a little baffling. Why

would a man throw seed onto the way side? Well, it's not really that far-fetched if you understand the agricultural set-up of the land. Long stretches of land for farming are accessed only by walking in those biblical days, where they didn't have the kind of roads or concrete footpaths that we have today. As long as they could find a path through, people would just walk through it. As people continually walk along a certain stretch of farmland, a recognisable beaten path becomes noticeable and that's called way side, which is normally near the borders of a person's land. So, when a man casts his seed, he takes a good measure of seed in his hand and carefully scatters the seed. In so doing, some of it will surely fall on those beaten paths (i.e. the way side), not that he purposely let the seed drop there. He aims for the good ground but as he casts the seed, some will inadvertently fall there. But because the way side is hardened ground, there is no loose soil for the seed to sink into. Here's where the birds of the sky come into the picture—they will stoop down to devour the seeds the moment the sower turns his back to continue his sowing elsewhere.



The analogy is obvious. When the Word of God is preached to those with hardened hearts, who “understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one (i.e. Satan, the devil), and catcheth away that which was sown in (their) heart” (v. 19a, b). When those who listen to the preaching do not really understand what is being said, it is not



that they don't have intelligence, but rather they couldn't spiritually perceive it, for spiritual things are spiritually discerned (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14). Satan, who is constantly on the prowl, immediately intervenes to take away the word out of their hearts, “lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12c)! He is undeniably our souls' adversary and the sworn hinderer of the kingdom of God. Ask yourself whether your hearing of God's Word is making sense to you? Do the kingdom truths stir your heart, that your heart is held and attracted by the truths which arrest your attention? Do these words have free course in your life, such that you embrace the truth of the Gospel? Or are you a “way side” hearer?

The Stony Ground

Now, let's look at the second type of ground where the seed is cast. “Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth” (v. 5). When the sower casts the seed, some fall among the stones. In such a situation, one probably won't see the rock in its entirety. A small portion of rock is exposed above ground surface, while the rest are buried in the ground. The soil there is not very deep. Immediately after the first layer of soil is the rock strata, so the roots cannot go deep down. “And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away” (v. 6). Sure, the little seedlings will sprout, but they won't last long because



of the lack of deepness of soil. Such ground represents one who “heareth the word, and anon (i.e. immediately) with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (vv. 20-21).

Tragically, such hearers are many. Many churchgoers are happy to hear God’s Word being preached. They love to hear an eloquent preacher, a professional speaker/orator; they exude a kind of excitement akin to that of true believers. They will allow the Word of God to apply to a superficial level, but they have no interest in letting the Word take hold of their life fully. The “joy” that they exhibit is temporary, not lasting. Momentary joy of listening to God’s Word is not good enough. If you don’t let the Word of God that you have heard take control of your heart and make the necessary change in your life, it will not lead to the kingdom of God. What God wants from us is not partial joy but a wholehearted joy of listening to His Word which, having the life of God and having been buried deep in our hearts, may germinate, flourish and bear fruit in our life.

It is sad that many come to church with wrong motivations. They fail to realise that Christianity entails entering into a formidable arena of spiritual conflict, whereby we not only have to constantly fight against sin to the end but also to contend with the disdain and hostility of this sin-filled world. “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13). In fact, according to the apostle Paul, “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22b)!

No wonder “when ... persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he (i.e. the “stony ground” hearer) is offended (i.e. becomes stumbled)” (v. 21).

The Thorn-Infested Ground

Verse 7 mentions a third ground: “And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them”. It is a thorn-infested ground. Admittedly, seeds that fall onto such ground will still be able to grow initially as the thorns were not full grown. But soon “the thorns sprung up”, which suggests that the plot of ground is not properly tilled and diligently cleared of weeds and unwanted growths. These will then deprive the young shoots of their nutrients, causing them to be “choked” (i.e. crowded out).

This thorn-infested ground depicts hearers of God’s Word who are captivated (and thereby held captive) by the energy-sapping cares and economic struggles of daily living. As v. 22 puts it, they allow “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches (to) choke the word, and ... becometh unfruitful.” Their inordinate craving for earthly riches is their overriding preoccupation in life. Of course, riches per se cannot be enjoyed. What can be enjoyed, rather, are the



goods and services which money can buy and secure. In constantly worrying about making ends meet and trying to thrive in this affluent world system, they crave for more wealth to secure more goods and services to fulfil (unfortunately) the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Such people are as the Gentiles who take too much thought for their life, worrying over “What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” (cf. Matthew 6:31-32a). People who are in continual bondage to this world system effectively suppress the words of Christ, which will not be allowed to flourish in them. To quote Matthew 6:33 negatively, they fail to “seek ... first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto (them)”.

The Good Ground

All the foregoing three descriptions of grounds, onto which seed is sown, end up in absolute deadness. No lasting life springs up on the way side, stony ground and thorn-infested ground. Only on the good ground, the seed can grow and be fruitful. “But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold” (v. 8). This good ground with good, deep soil will allow the seed to germinate, and grow, and flourish, and ultimately yield a good crop.

Those who hear God’s Word with receptive hearts, having “the eyes of (their) understanding being enlightened” (Ephesians 1:18a) concerning “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and

knowledge of God” (Romans 11:33a), are likened to such good ground. Just as a good ground will not have anything that will impede the growth of the seed, such hearers will not allow anything to remain in the heart that will obstruct the growth of the Word of God. They “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save (their) souls” (James 1:21b); they are like one who “looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, ... being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, ... blessed in his deed” (James 1:21b). Truly, such is “he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (v. 23b). He will not be a professing believer, but a fruit-bearing Christian.

May God help all of us not to be mere excited hearers of God’s Word, or else we are all just spectators. Dear reader, what kind of “ground” are you? Is your heart like the way side, or the stony ground, or the thorn-infested ground, or the good ground? In this parable, the sower is one and the seed is one, but the grounds are various. May we pray that ours be that which is ready to hear, understand and bear the fruits—as manifested by a fruit-bearing Christian who would let the Word grow till all the good pleasures of God be fulfilled in him. Indeed, he is one whose “delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (Psalm 1:2-3). Amen.





Parable of Among

In Matthew 13:24-30, the Bible records the second of a series of seven Kingdom parables, which was labelled by Christ's disciples as "the parable of the tares of the field" (Matthew 13:36b). The emphasis is obviously on the unexpected and unwanted presence of tares in a field that is supposedly designated to be one that is wholly full of wheat.

To gain insight into this parable, it behoves us to recall the reasons why Jesus told His parables. According to Matthew 13:10-16, the purpose for Christ telling parables is twofold. Firstly, it was to hide the truths from the unbelieving; secondly, it was meant to reveal the truths of God's kingdom in a clearer way to the believing. Parables are meant to declare judgment upon the unbelieving and to prepare God's people for all the blessings of salvation and His kingdom.

Kingdom Parables Underscore God's Unthwarted Reign

Furthermore, many of these parables are called Kingdom parables, which are meant to underscore the fact that God reigns. Throughout the Old Testament,

especially in the Book of Psalms, the phrase "the Lord reigneth" is repeatedly proclaimed. The Lord is not a God who has lost His control over the things He has created. He still reigns! Although Satan brought sin and misery into the world and corrupted His creation, they are allowed by God for His higher purposes.

One of the greatest things the Bible teaches us is not to be frustrated when wickedness and the wicked flourish. Fret not because of the wicked! The psalmist expresses this most pointedly in Psalm 37:1-10. "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring *it* to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any

the Tares the Wheat

MATTHEW 13:24-30, 37-43

Prabhudas Koshy

wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked *shall not be*: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it *shall not be*.”

We see the above truth corroborated time and time again in many biblical accounts. One prominent instance that comes readily to mind is the way how God brought His people, Israel, up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed them out of the bondage of slavery. When the time came for their deliverance (in accordance with God’s promise in Genesis 15:13-14), after being afflicted for 400 years “in a land *that is not theirs*”, He duly brought them out of Egypt with a mighty Hand. In the midst of the atrocities, wickedness and evil around them, God still reigneth and His providential Hand was still at work!

This beautiful yet profound message of God’s reign, which can never be thwarted, will be scoffed at by those who reject God and His kingdom. As Christ asserts at the end of His explanation of this parable, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (v. 43b). It is not that the unbelieving listeners do not have ears, but rather, they do not have the spiritual perception of

the Kingdom truths. They do not come in full surrender to Christ, thus the truth eludes them. In other words, parables are meant for those who would bow their heads before the greatness of God, including the parable under our study.

Coexistence of the Righteous and Wicked in the World

Now, in this parable of the tares of the field, Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way” (vv. 24-25). Then we are told, “He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom (i.e. born-again believers); but the tares are the children of the wicked one (i.e. the unbelievers); the enemy that sowed them is the devil” (vv. 37-39a).

The King of the kingdom of heaven, out of his love for the people, has come to this world to provide salvation to those who would believe on Him (cf. 1 John 3:16a). It is interesting to note that the

good seed being sown in this parable is not the Word of God (as is the case in the previous parable), but a reference to those who have trusted in Christ and given the power to become the children of God's kingdom. The tares (which the sower's enemy has stealthily planted), on the other hand, refer to the children of the wicked one. But the trouble is: "when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also" (v. 26). It is not the wheat that is contaminating or posing a danger to the tares, but the tares seeking to root out the wheat! This drives home to us the harsh, undeniable fact that in the world, there is constantly this mixture of the good and bad. The King's enemy, the devil—also known as "the prince of the power of the air"—is "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience", who are constantly being instigated to walk according to the lusts of the flesh, "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (cf. Ephesians 2:2-3). While we sojourn here on earth as strangers and pilgrims, we must be prepared to resist the ill influences of the world

and face its hostility (cf. John 15:18-19; 1 John 2:15-16).

The world we are in is a battlefield surrounded by "tares"—the children of the wicked. Christ, the Sower, came to put His people in this world, in the midst of constant rebellion and rejection of Christ. No effort is spared by the tares of this world in propagating thoughts, philosophies, ideologies, lifestyles that are contrary to the Scriptures. But children of God's kingdom need not be dismayed. As you grow daily by feeding upon God's Word, you would be led by the Holy Spirit to be discerning. While God has not placed us in a perfect world, He has promised in John 10:28 that "neither shall any man pluck them (His sheep) out of my hand". True, He has placed us in a sinful world, but He will preserve us till the very end! This fact should encourage believers to be willing and courageous to go where God sends them. Although it is difficult for the church to co-exist with the bad elements in this world, yet the Lord has chosen the ground and has planted us where



we are in this world. So despite “tares” that surround the church, the mission field and wherever you may be a part of, do not give up as there is a purpose for which the Sower has placed you there.

This dogged, vigilant coexistence is hinted at in the householder’s answer to his servants when they came and requested whether they should remove the tares: “But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them” (v. 29). Here, Christ is exhorting a need to change the way we think about adverse situations that afflict believers, especially those whom we care for a lot. Parents, when your children pass through great trials because of their allegiance to Christ, it is not your duty to immediately try and change the situation. God is their Protector! Knowing that “it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth” (Lamentations 3:27), we can only pray that their faith will be steadfast, and that the Lord will help them flourish through their afflictions. Dear Christian, whatever be your calling (a doctor, a teacher, a missionary, a pastor, etc.) in life, you would be in the midst of tares, which will try to choke out the vibrant life in Christ in you. But be comforted, the King is for you and He will not forget His children.

Separation of the Righteous and Wicked at the End of the World

But this coexistence will not be forever. Tares and wheat will both grow together until the harvest and be separately gathered up in the time of harvest. The

reapers will gather “first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them”, whereas the wheat will be gathered into the householder’s “barn” (v. 30). The meaning of this is clear: “the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels” (v 39b).

At the end of the age, the Son of man “shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire (a clear reference to hell): there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (vv. 41-42). The children of the wicked one face an unenviable end: they shall be “set ... in slippery places”, to be cast “down into destruction”, and be “utterly consumed with terrors” (Psalm 73:18-19)! Ultimate judgment awaits the wicked, who “shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty” (Job 21:20b). This intimates the second death, namely eternal damnation in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14), which is the ultimate and eternal destination and destiny of all the unbelievers who die in their sins.

The children of the kingdom, on the other hand, shall “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (v. 43a). With biblical hindsight from the Book of Revelation, we know we would be gathered into God’s “barn”—that new Jerusalem, where “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither ... pain” (Revelation 21:4). Truly, the enemy with all his efforts can never thwart God’s plan. God is able to gather His people out of the clutches of the enemy and give them victory. Christianity is a path of triumph, though not without struggle. The fiery darts of

the devil would come against us, but we shall stand and find victory by the Word of the Kingdom and the King.

Dear children of the kingdom of God, whatever be your circumstances, remember that's your God-designated place. It is no accident that you are placed in your school, in your family, in your workplace, among your friends, and even in your church. God has placed us where we are, so let us flourish. The tares, in the meantime, will grow in this world. The children of the wicked will do what their flesh (fallen nature) craves to do. They can't

help but walk "according to the course of this world" (Ephesians 2:2a), which is under the control of our adversary, the devil, the King's enemy. We fear not the spiritual battleground we are treading on. We remember our calling as the King's children and who our King is. We are safe in the arms of Jesus, and He will finally gather us into His presence. May these words of the parable—"but gather the wheat into my barn"—give us the everlasting consolation of our great King, Jesus Christ. Praise be unto His name!

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GETHSEMANE MEDIA CENTRE RENOVATION WORKS



Top Photo: Renovation works at the studio on Level 3. The frames for the acoustic walls and the suspension for the acoustic ceiling have been installed.
Bottom Photo: Panoramic view of the new office for Gethsemane Bible Witness Limited. The original infrastructure and walls have been removed.

We thank the LORD that the renovation works have been progressing steadily.

If you would like to aid Bible Witness Media Ministry in the purchasing of new equipment and renovation matters of 33 Ubi Crescent, you may send in your love gifts and cheques to "GETHSEMANE BIBLE WITNESS LIMITED", 33 Ubi Crescent, Singapore 408584.

Parable of the Mustard Seed

MATTHEW 13:31-32

Prabhudas Koshy

At the outset of this parable, we read concerning Jesus, the Master Teacher: “Another parable put he forth unto them” (Matthew 13:31a). Now, when Matthew used this expression about how Jesus “put forth” this parable unto His hearers, he used a Greek compound word (*paratithemi*), which is made up of two root words—*para* (which means “near” or “along”), and *tithemi* (meaning “to put before or near someone”). By means of a parable, the Lord seeks to bring the truth near us. He never intends the truths of the kingdom of heaven to be something that we admire at a distance; every truth of God’s kingdom must be embraced, held close to us.

Heavenly Truths Put Forth for Keeping & Passing On

Incidentally, this same Greek word (*paratithemi*) is often used to denote the act of placing food as close as possible before someone and inviting him to eat. So, metaphorically, this is used to highlight the eagerness with which a teacher propounds the truth to his disciples. And that’s what is happening here. Jesus, our Supreme Teacher, dishes out the wonderful realities and glories of the kingdom of heaven—as it were, placing them right before our hearts and minds—which we could never have learnt apart from His teaching.

There is yet another way this word (*paratithemi*) is translated in the New Testament, which has

the idea of committing to someone for keeping. Clearly, the truths of God's Word are presented, not for our cursory look and momentary enjoyment, but for them to be received and kept in our hearts and then passed on to others to keep. Undeniably, our duty when we receive the truths of Christ, whether in parabolic or in didactic form, is to see that we commit them to others. It's an ongoing process, which is corroborated by Paul when he said to Timothy about his duty as a pastor: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit [from the same Greek word (*paratithemi*)] thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). So when Matthew mentioned about the parable that Jesus put forth unto the hearers, he's saying that Jesus wanted them to perceive, be delighted and be spiritually fed by its truths, and from there pass on those truths to others.

Gospel-Power of Kingdom Parables

Now, from Jesus' opening statement of this parable, "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed" (Matthew 13:31b), we note that it has to do with the kingdom of heaven. This parable, together with the other so-called Kingdom parables, reveals the great realities, principles, administration, appearance and promises of the kingdom of God. Each of these refers to varying facts and facets of Christ's kingdom. Indeed, Christ is a King and has come to establish His kingdom. While it is promised in the Old Testament that Christ would set up His physical, earthly

kingdom at the end of the age, He would have to first come to establish His kingdom in the hearts of the people.

This is only possible if we "Repent: for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). If we don't repent of our sins, God's kingdom will not reign in our heart. As God's people, we must surrender to His divine supremacy by preparing our heart in humility, giving up our own vainglory in our lustful pursuits of life, and honouring our lives with His glorious kingdom. Our natural, innate lives are full of brokenness, strife and misery, but Christ is able to cleanse our lives, and beautify our thoughts, and make our life to be a true display of His glorious kingdom. Such is the power of the Gospel working in a person's heart, which will in time make him a fruit-bearer of God's kingdom.

Despise Not Small Beginnings

In this parable, we were told of "a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field" (Matthew 13:31c). We see a man going out with just one grain of seed, which Jesus referred to as "the least of all seeds" (Matthew 13:32a). Here a farmer is not embarking on a huge cultivation effort, but is only involved in the sowing and (of course, over time) careful watering and nurturing of a grain of mustard seed. He probably was a man who would normally plant other seeds, like corn, wheat, barley, etc. that will yield vegetables or herbs which farmers plant for the purpose of cooking and eating. Comparatively, among all the seeds known to be grown in the

gardens and fields in Palestine and that part of the world, none was as small as the mustard seed. Among the seeds that they were accustomed to, when it comes to planting of those seeds of the herbs, the mustard seed was the smallest. But amazingly, when the mustard seed is grown, it becomes the greatest among all the various herbs and shrubs the farmer had planted (cf. Matthew 13:32b)!

With that, let's consider the amazing truth Jesus is saying here. Now, the kingdom of God is eternal in proportion, its power is eternal, its size is eternal, it is timeless. So, to compare the kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed is to regard its small, humble beginnings. This suggests to us that when the kingdom of God works on earth, God wants us to know that He doesn't need to manifest all the glory right away, contrary to the prejudiced mindset of the Jewish masses. You see, the Jews were expecting the kingdom of God to suddenly burst forth in great power, crushing the Romans and all the Gentiles, with Jerusalem being exalted among the nations and thereby precipitating the glorious kingdom of God on earth. They were looking for that fascinating, explosive renewal of Jerusalem and the restoration of the nation of Israel in great power! But alas, that's not how God is planning to do it, or else Jerusalem and Israel will be completely destroyed! This is because nobody is worthy to be part of God's kingdom. We're all sinners, deserving to die before God's glorious presence.

But God has His way of working. He takes a humble man and puts His power in him, and uses him to expand His evangelistic purposes across the face

of the earth—until a great multitude of saints be redeemed to God “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (cf. Revelation 5:9b). Until that appointed day of Christ's return to this earth to reign supreme as the King of kings from Jerusalem (as predicted in the Bible), God will continue to choose to use small things, small efforts of God's people to display His greatness. We need not look for extraordinary, exquisite, magnificent initiatives to do God's work. Whatever and however you are, if you yield to the Gospel truths, you would, as Scripture says, see that the Gospel is the omnipotent power of God unto salvation. Clearly intimated in this parable to the disciples is the fact that the kingdom of heaven is not about some majestic appearance of God's power right at the outset, though it will invariably lead to the glorious majestic manifestation of God's kingdom in the end.

Ultimate Flourishing of Small Gospel Beginnings

Now, let's pay attention to the glorious outcome of the mustard seed when fully grown. The mustard seed, “when it is grown ... is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Matthew 13:32b, c). Well, how wonderful is that statement! A man takes and plants that small seed with a purpose of seeing it grow and become a tree. Now, of course, the word “tree” here should not be taken to mean it will grow like unto the cedar trees of Lebanon. Those huge mustard shrubs normally can grow

up to about 15 feet, much higher than a man's height. They are really garden plants, most of which would easily grow up to a man's height (maybe about 8-10 feet), with some even to about 12 to 15 feet. Though they are not trees with big branches (as we sometimes imagine), lots of bush birds would come and make their nests and stay among these shrubs of mustard. In His peculiar explanation about the kingdom of God here, the Lord is actually saying to His disciples, 'Look, if you have faith in the things that I have explained to you, you are going to see the potential of God's kingdom.'

Jesus' earthly ministry was itself a magnificent manifestation of this potential. He did not sit upon any worldly throne; neither was He accompanied by contingents of soldiers nor even sat upon a white horse. In fact, He was usually surrounded by the lower classes and country people, who were separated in society from the upper and wealthy classes. He lived and moved around with just a handful of despised Galilean disciples (not considered as pure Jews by those in Judaea), who were scorned at by the Pharisees, looked down by the Sanhedrin, and rejected by the Romans. But that was the very purpose and plan of God. This is God working out His plan to save for Himself a people, whom He has elected before the foundation of the world, that He may put His spirit and the knowledge of His Word in their heart, so that His kingdom will spread, gathering and securing all His people throughout the ages.

This "mustard seed" phenomenon is intimated in Romans 15:8-13. "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision

(referring to the Jews) for the truth of God" (v. 8). Jesus' ministry was solely in Israel, for He never went out of Israel's borders, but the Lord sent the apostles to take the Gospel unto "Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth", in accordance with the Acts 1:8 'evangelistic blueprint', so that "the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people" (vv. 9-11). Now, Jesus didn't go to the Gentiles; He came only to the Jews and preached among them, but His Gospel must go to the Gentiles, as already predicted in the Old Testament by Isaiah. "And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust" (v. 12).

Well, that's what Christianity is about. Humble beginnings but ultimate flourishing, because the power of the Holy Ghost is going to work out all things (cf. v. 13). We are not to limit our expectation for the Gospel. We cannot, because this is an infinite power at work. We may be small; we may not even dare to dream anything. Just say, 'Lord, make me all that you want me to be; cause our church to go as far as you want us to go.' The Lord says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed"—it has all the potential to be what it ought to be.



Parable of the Net

MATTHEW 13:47-50

Prabhudas Koshy

As we come to the end of a series of parables in Matthew 13 which the apostle Matthew (moved by the Holy Spirit) saw fit to record, Jesus narrates this particular parable that speaks of the kingdom of God as a “net”. A net was cast into the sea by fishermen so that they may catch fish. People living around the Galilee region had always been familiar with fishing. For most, fishing was a way of life and a common business, given that the Sea of Galilee was filled with all kinds of fish, even as it is the case today.

Catching of Fish as Analogy for Soul- Reaping

Now, there are three normal methods of catching fish, which incidentally are all mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew. One method is by throwing a line with a hook at the end, as indicated by the Greek word (*agkistron*) translated as “hook” in Matthew 17:27. We see this method in action when Jesus said to Peter, “... go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee” (Matthew 17:27). A second method is the act of casting a net from a fishing

boat to catch fish, as denoted by the Greek word (*amphiblestron*) translated as “net” in Matthew 4:18. Upon reaching a spot in the sea where the fishermen sense the appearance of fish in the water, they swing their net overboard, which will then become wide open and sink into the water quickly, whereby a group of fish will be caught in there. We see this method in use when Jesus called Peter and Andrew as He was walking by the sea of Galilee; He saw the two brothers “casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:18-19). This was a common method of catching fish in Jesus’ time. And that’s exactly the imagery Jesus used when they, as “fishers of men”, are to pull men in together to Christ.

The third fishing method is found in this parable, whereby a dragnet or troll net is employed, as denoted by the Greek term (*sagene*) translated as “net” in Matthew 13:47. A very long stretch of net (which can be as long as one half of a mile) is in operation here. One end of it will be attached to the shore, perhaps to a tree or pillar, while the other end will be in the hands of the fishermen in the boat moving out to sea. When the dragnet is extended to its full length out at sea, the boat will then go in a circle and bring the other end back to the shore. Because of its immense size, a mixture of all kinds of

sea creatures (found within the perimeter of sea encircled by the 'circumference' of the boat's travelling route) are also dragged in. This is referenced by Jesus when He says that the net "was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind" (v. 47b). Now, once all things are brought to the shore, fishermen have an immense job to finish, having to separate between those which are good and useful, and those which are bad and useless. And this is the process that Jesus actually explains here: "Which, when it (the net) was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" (v. 48). So the good fish caught, they would put into big "vessels" (i.e. receptacles like pots or pails) with water, so that these can live a little longer, to keep them fresh before they are sold/cooked. But as for the bad ones that are not useful for man, they will throw back into the sea, or cast them away as rubbish!

In a nutshell, in this specific method of catching fish, there are two important emphases that Jesus brings across: gathering, followed by separation. The latter is a very deliberate, careful and unhurried work; the fishermen involved need to have a good knowledge of the good fish versus the bad ones. If you are not knowledgeable, you may throw away good ones and keep the bad ones that are of no use. So, this work is a meticulous task that requires accurate knowledge and involves a very skilful process of sorting out the good from the bad. When they sit down and do this work, they do it very carefully, painstakingly.

And Jesus uses this story to tell us what the kingdom of heaven is like. Note the two major truths alluded to here.

There will be a gathering of all men at the end of the age, following which will be a separation of the righteous from the unrighteous. "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just" (v. 49). By pointing to the fishermen who separate the good and the bad fish, the emphasis is about the separation of the just and the wicked. It must have been shocking to the hearers that the kingdom of heaven is here described as this frightening—but sure—event that will come suddenly upon every man. In this vast sea of humanity, the entire humanity is being dragged by the "net" of time into that eternal shore, where there would be a great division of the just and the wicked. And nobody escapes...

Inexorable Moving of Time into Eternity

Silently, the "net" of time has been moving relentlessly through the ages. Just as all those creatures in the sea are caught unawares by the huge dragnet being pulled towards the shore, many unsuspecting souls are daily being dragged to that eternal shore of judgment. This is corroborated by the fact that tens of thousands of people are dying every day in the world. Today or tomorrow may be your last day on earth. Nobody can say he is going to extend his life on earth for a day longer. God is the One who decides your time. It is "appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). This 'dragnet' of time is drawing us to stand before God, the King. We all have to give an account sooner than we think. The ignoring of God and the enjoying of sinful pleasures will cause

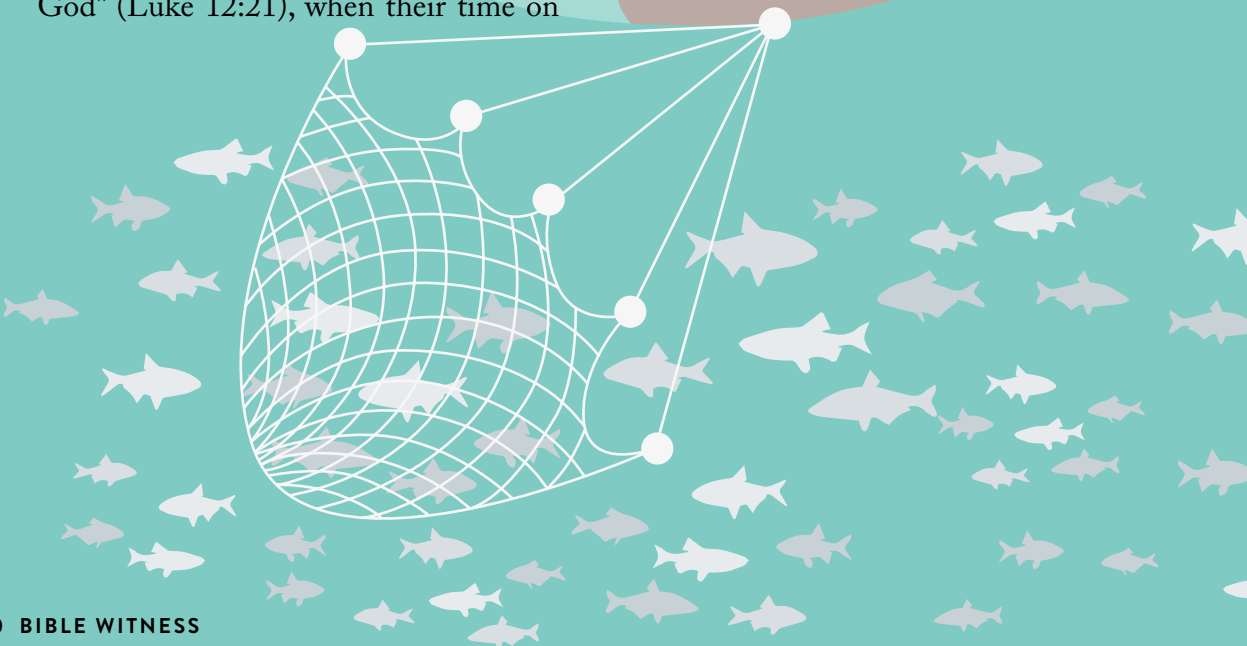
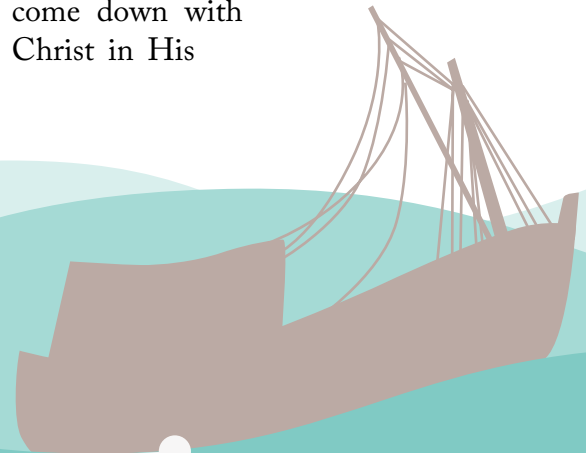
many men to disregard such a reality. Countless will be suddenly taken and be right there at that moment of judgment.

Dear reader, do not be like the certain rich fool in Luke 12:16-21, who had a plentiful harvest and harboured ambitious plans to build bigger barns to store all his goods. Presumptuously thinking that he had enough laid up for many years, he took his ease without any regard for God, not realising that his soul would be required of him that very night. Neither be like the rich man mentioned in Lazarus' life (Luke 16:19-23), who enjoyed life right to the end with no regard for godliness or for the poor, until "it came to pass, that ... the rich man also died, and was buried" (v. 22), and ended up "in hell ... being in torments" (v. 23a). Both these characters, together with countless other foolish mortals, fail to note that time and tide waits for no man. They conveniently, nay blatantly, ignore the inexorable ticking away of the timespan of their lives on earth, with only one unerring certainty awaiting at the end. By "lay[ing] up treasure for [themselves], and [being] not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21), when their time on

earth is up, they are irrevocably ushered into a hopeless eternity without God!

Ultimate Casting Away of the Bad

To be sure, there are many aspects to the kingdom of God, which are specifically distinguished in the contexts of respective parables. Here the kingdom of heaven is referred to as the act of judgment that would happen at the end of the age. "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth ..." (v. 49a). There is angelic involvement in the judgment of the world; God will involve the angels, who will come down with Christ in His



glory. This fact is highlighted in Matthew 25:31: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory”. This expression of Christ sitting upon the throne of His glory tells us that He sits for the intended purpose of judging. To the believing, the King shall say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). To the unbelieving, shall the King say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). That will be ultimate casting away of the wicked.

Let’s pay attention to how Jesus explains the end of the wicked. They shall be cast “into the furnace of fire” (Matthew 13:50a)—and that’s hell. Let nobody ever tell you it’s just an imagery, and not real fire. According to Matthew 25:41, it is an “everlasting fire”—a fire that will burn forever and ever! Moreover, “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:50b). Those are expressions of great pain and agony. It is a horrifying and fearful scene, and hence a dreadful description of the ultimate casting away of the wicked. This is the second death (which is a reference to judgment in hell). “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15)!

Prepare to Meet Thy God!

Now, let’s remember something unmistakably clear—God is King. Life and death are appointed by Him. You may be thinking you are going to live long, but only God knows how long. Even if you live long, your death can come so suddenly to remove you. Are you ready to meet the King who sitteth upon the throne? In fact, this question was inherent in Jesus’ query to His hearers at the end of this parable: “Have ye understood all these things?” (Matthew 13:51a). If your answer is “Yea, Lord” (v. 51b), then you cannot continue to neglect the salvation and nurture of your souls. Do not neglect attending church activities, praying, reading the Scriptures, etc. Be part of His kingdom activities. By living the way you lived, think not you will escape the King’s judgment. For He alone is King—that’s the message of the kingdom of God.

Do not fall into the hands of an angry God. Repent and acknowledge Him as King. Give glory to Him by trusting and following Him. The Lord is King; He will judge with justice and righteous judgment. Every man will be judged according to his works by a great God who has no problem in remembering every detail great and small. He doesn’t need any witness, for He has everything recorded in the books of man’s works, which He will open in judgment. So, dear reader, may you humbly seek Him.

Jim Elliot

(1927-1956)

Part I

(Retold from "Jim Elliot - He is No Fool" by Irene Howat, published by Focus Publications, Scotland, the United Kingdom; "Jim Elliot - Missionary to Ecuador" by Susan Martins Miller, published by Barbour and Company, Inc, Ohio, the United States; "He Changed Them" by David Porter, published by Christian Focus Publications, Scotland, Great Britain.)

Retold by Jenny Lok

Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

One beautiful summer day, both Jim Elliot and his friend, DK (as he was commonly known), set out to explore the bridges in Portland. With much eagerness, they jumped on their bikes and pedalled off, happy to feel the warm, golden rays of the afternoon sun on their backs. Jim was no stranger to the big port city of Portland (in Oregon, USA), where he was born after his family had moved from Seattle. Portland's geography fascinated Jim, and DK could not have a better friend to help him with his school assignment on Portland bridges. Minutes later, while munching on egg sandwiches which Jim's mother (Mum Elliot) had prepared for them, they were deep in conversation about St John Bridge's streamlined design as they stood right in front of it.

Suddenly, Jim said aloud, "I think Jesus is like a bridge."

DK was amused and replied, "Everything seems to remind you about Jesus. I am only reminded of Him once a month when I am dragged out of bed to go to church."

Jim prayed silently for God's wisdom to say a word for Jesus. "It all began when Adam and Eve sinned against God," Jim explained. "Since then, man is separated from God by a deep gulf."

"What about the bridge?" DK asked laughingly.

"Well, Jesus died on the cross for our sins. If we turn away

from our sins and believe in Jesus, He'll forgive our sins and provide a way back to God. So you see, Jesus is like a bridge that enables all who put their trust in Him to cross over the gulf of sins to God. The wonderful thing is that we get to heaven when we die."

"So Jesus is like a bridge between God and man. He is the only way to get from earth to heaven, is that right?"

"Absolutely!" Jim replied.

By now, DK was very curious to know more about Jim's faith in Christ. Jim was truly delighted at this opportunity, so while they were cycling home, he eagerly shared with DK how he trusted in Jesus as his Saviour at the age of 6. His parents were God-loving Christians. Without fail, every morning and evening, the entire family would read the Bible and pray together.

Just before they parted, Jim said to DK, "I believe Jesus will be coming again. All who believe in Him will be taken to heaven."

"How about the rest?" DK was quick to ask.

With a sombre look on his face, Jim answered, "It is said in the Bible that those who do not trust in Christ will enter hell."



DK was silent and Jim could only pray that one day, DK would follow Christ.

Soon, the school summer holidays came. Jim's family, particularly the children, could not wait to visit Grandfather and Grandmother Luginbuhl in eastern Washington. How Jim longed to walk all round the Luginbuhl homestead and take in the delicious aroma of warm peaches, freshly baked hot bread, as well as the pleasant, familiar smell of little lambs and of broad beans, newly picked from the garden! Upon arrival at the Luginbuhl homestead, Jim wasted no time in getting to his favourite orphan lamb which had since grown into a fine-looking sheep. There was no doubt that everyone in the family enjoyed the sweet and cosy times together, talking and laughing. Grandfather and Grandmother Luginbuhl were so thankful to God for keeping their grandchildren close to the Lord.

The rest of the holidays went like a whirlwind and soon the Elliot family was back in Portland. Shortly after, Jim entered the Benson Polytechnic High School. That was the year 1941. He majored in architectural drawing and was also a keen follower of the National Football League. Despite his love for sports and the outdoors, he still made time to give talks to fellow students. It was simple preaching of the Gospel and before long, he was known in his high school as a "teenage preacher". In high school, it was common to see teenagers pairing up, but Jim felt that he had more important things to do. His first priority was God



and he had thought of being a missionary for some time. In fact, he even did some track training to prepare himself for a tough missionary life!

Time sped by and Jim was due to enter Wheaton College in 1945. Jane, his sister, was very concerned that he would not be able to pay his fees at the new college. Looking calm and not in the least worried, Jim said, "I know God will supply all my needs if he truly wants me to study at Wheaton." Two months later, Jim had good news for everyone at home in Portland. God provided a sum of money through a friend. Besides, he had won a scholarship and managed to find a part-time job. Jim rejoiced that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). Nevertheless, Jim was always careful with his spending, eating mainly fruits and salads.

Apart from managing his money well, Jim also engaged in sports to strengthen his muscles because he believed that it was part of his training to serve God in the future. More importantly, he made sure that his alarm clock was set at a time that would enable him to spend sufficient time reading his Bible and praying before the day began. Even from afar, he continued to encourage his sister Jane to read God's Word, reminding her of what John Bunyan had said, "Sin will keep you from this Book (the Bible), or this Book will keep you from sin." He also urged his sister to be bold in giving out Gospel tracts to her high schoolmates right from the beginning of school. Furthermore, he advised her to commit Bible verses to memory on her way to school daily.

When the first term at Wheaton College came to an end, Jim planned to hitchhike home as he did not have much money. To Jim, the entire journey was "a real faith-strengthening experience"! God providentially sent several kind souls who brought him all the way from Wheaton College to Portland, taking "70 hours in 20 different vehicles". The amazing thing was that he "beat the slow train home"! Back home, Jim updated everyone on his first term in Wheaton. He lamented that, having to spend much time on his university subjects, he had little time left for Bible reading, prayer and fellowship with Christian friends. "How I wish I have more time to study the Bible," he said with a sigh.

It was indeed a great summer for Jim. He was glad to spend some time at home helping his dad pick fruits in their garden, for it gave him great pleasure to work in "the good Oregon soil". At the same time, he also got in touch with one of his old classmates, who bought him a book on the Chinook Indian language. Jim, who picked up languages easily, was soon writing to his classmate in Chinook!

Besides enjoying precious moments with his family, he was also active in the Wheaton's Student Foreign Missions Fellowship. On one occasion, a group of six, which included Jim, conducted a meeting with the university student group. The

theme was missions. After the meeting, the young people stopped by a café for some night snacks as they were famished. There, they took the opportunity to speak to the waitress about Jesus, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). The waitress was amused that they should preach to her, an American, when they could have preached to people in other countries. Unlike her, Jim believed that Americans needed the Gospel as much as the rest of the world.

In the spring of 1947, Jim’s fellow student, Ron Hams, invited him to visit his family in Mexico. Another student, Ben, joined them soon after. Along the way, while they hitchhiked, they had the opportunity to witness for Christ when they took a ride from a truck driver. Throughout the journey to Mexico, both Ron and Jim never failed to share the Gospel and to give out tracts to those with whom they came into contact. The first two weeks in Mexico straightaway made Jim long to remain there. He was truly enthusiastic in learning Spanish and seeing the missionary work in Mexico. In his letter back home, he wrote, as his last sentence: “Missionaries are very human folks, just doing what they are asked. Simply a bunch of nobodies trying to exalt somebody.”

Before he left Mexico, Ron’s father, Mr Hams, invited him to speak to a group of children who spoke mainly Spanish. Jim tried telling the story of Noah and the ark in Spanish. The children were amazed as they knew his Spanish vocabulary was limited. Occasionally, Jim was at a loss for words, but the children happily supplied him with Spanish words as he went along. The children were indeed captivated by this new young teacher! At the end of the six weeks in Mexico, Jim decided that he did not mind being a nobody if he could bring sinners to Christ. More than ever before, it prompted him to reach out to those who had not heard the Gospel. Though he had no specific people or country in mind, he somehow knew in his heart that it would probably be in Latin America.

(To be continued...)

Bible Trivia — Numbers 3

Sarah Yong

The tribe of Levi had not been numbered among the fighting men of Israel. They were given a distinct charge and appointment “over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it” (Numbers 1:50a).

1. Read Numbers 3:2-16, and then fill in each blank with the right answer.

Aaron had four sons. _____ and _____ died before the LORD, when they offered strange fire before the LORD. His other two sons, _____ and _____ ministered in the priest's office in the sight of Aaron their father. The Levites were set apart to assist the _____ (i.e. Aaron and his sons), to do the service of the _____. To this end, Moses was instructed to number the children of Levi after the house of their _____. And he was supposed to number every male from _____ old and upward.

2. Read Numbers 3:17-37, and then complete the flowchart about the sons of Levi and their respective details in the service of the Tabernacle.

Sons of Levi



Gershon [vv. 21-26]
Pitch camp westward
Total No. of Males: _____



Items under their Custody

- the tabernacle
- the _____ and covering
- the _____ for the door of the tabernacle
- the hangings of the court
- the _____ for the door of the court
- cords



_____ [vv. 27-31]
Pitch camp _____
Total No. of Males: _____



Items under their Custody

- the _____
- the Table
- the _____
- the altars
- the _____ of the sanctuary
- the hanging of the sanctuary



_____ [vv. 33-37]
Pitch camp _____
Total No. of Males: _____



Items under their Custody

- the _____ of the tabernacle
- the bars and pillars thereof
- the _____ thereof
- all the vessels of the tabernacle
- the _____ of the court
- their sockets, pins and cords



Gethsemane Media Centre

By God's grace, we have obtained the new premises at 33 Ubi Crescent.

Demolition works and other renovation works have started. We covet your prayers that all the works will be completed in the coming two months. Some photos of the renovation work can be found on page 13.

(Photo: Scaffolding erected on the facade of the building.)