

Letter from Babylon



Reflections on living in a land under judgment

by 'Mishael'

How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?' exiled Israel lamented in Psalm 137. Well, here we are in Babylon, so we ought to be asking the same question. It's all too easy to sing from society's godless hymn sheet. The answer ought to be obvious – get stuck into God's word, the Bible. You all knew that, didn't you?

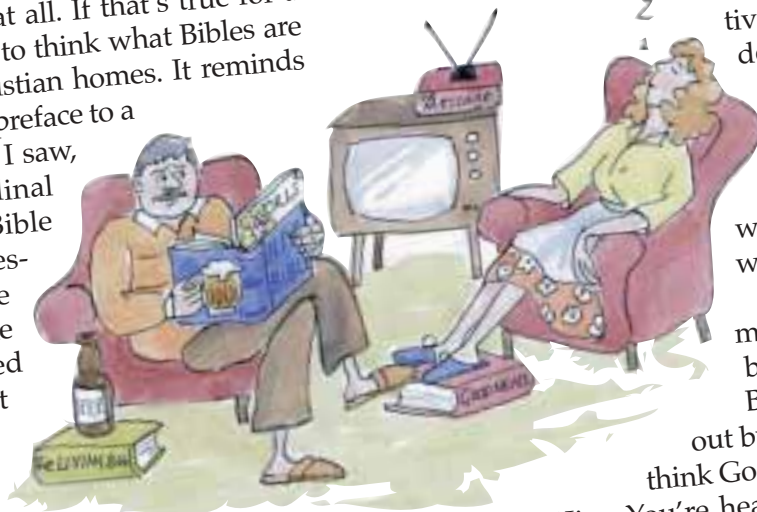
I'm lucky, because we have a strong Bible ministry in my church. Yet my pastor, on his visits, finds that in practice many of us read our Bibles seldom, if at all. If that's true for a 'Bible church' I dread to think what Bibles are used for in most Christian homes. It reminds me of the depressing preface to a Catholic school Bible I saw, in which a Cardinal wrote, 'Although Bible reading is not necessary for salvation the Church treasures the Bible as the inspired word of God.' That sounds like best-china-cupboard treasure – the Bible is the sort of treasure that should be falling apart from use.

Now you're actually reading a Christian magazine, so maybe I'm preaching to the converted. But I suspect not... so many Christians would rather read a Christian magazine than God's word. Or read devotional thoughts, or the Extra Informative Version study footnotes, or even the NIV headings... anything rather than the 'pure milk of the word.' And that's not to mention the endless 'pictures' of earthquakes or helicopters or whatever that so many imagine tell them more of God's mind than His eternal Scripture. C S Lewis said perceptively, 'It seems the more the Bible is translated, the less it is read.'

So why read and study the Bible? To find out how to live? Well, yes – but the message of grace is not a book of rules.

To learn about God? Closer – unless God reveals Himself, we can know virtually nothing about Him. If your King has written an autobiography, it makes sense to read it, surely.

To see God's salvation unfold? Now that's a lot better. If you find it hard to get much teaching out of the countless stories of the Bible, it's because you don't realise the stories are the



teaching. The narrative of how God deals with the world, and with individual people in it, is what teaches us who he is.

That leads to my main point – by reading the Bible, breathed out by God, you get to think God's thoughts after Him. You're hearing God's story in His own words – and becoming part of that story as you do so. Sooner or later, you begin to think like God thinks – and that's when you start singing His songs in this strange land.

How? Just read! Big chunks of 1-3 chapters a day – let it just tell its stories. Make sure that over time (1-3 years) it all gets read. But also study smaller bits. Read a chapter, and write notes so you have to concentrate. Or buy Bible Study (not devotional) notes. Or *Search the Scriptures* (£9.43 from Amazon) – an oldie but a goodie, like the Bible. It's possible – it really is. The alternative is just to hang up your harp and learn Babylonian.

