the Explorer

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Free

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Mrs Isobel McQueer
The Manse, Tordarroch, Farr,
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Puzzles

Young folk are encouraged to complete the various puzzles in the magazine and send them in to:
Miss Anne Macaulay
30 Mackenzie Place,
Maryburgh IV7 8DY

Younger readers who find the questions too hard may like to do a drawing based on one of the articles and send it to the same address.

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Contact the Editor

Rev Murdo A N Macleod
Free Church Manse, Skeabost Bridge,
Isle of Skye IV51 9NP
Tel: 01470 532725
Email: explorer@fccontinuing.org

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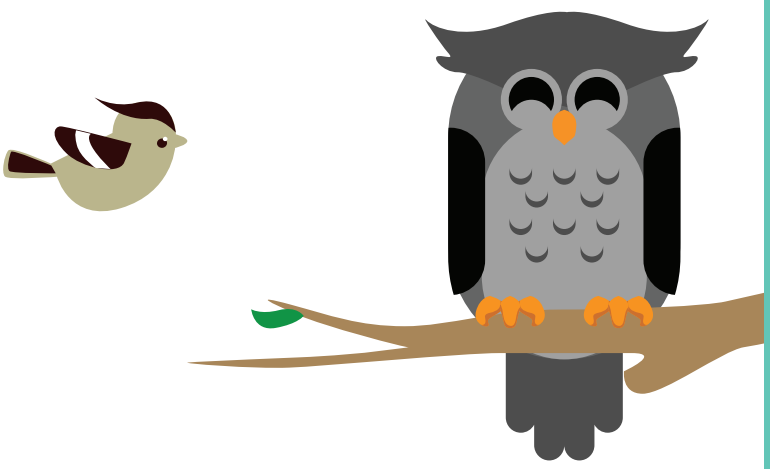
SKIPPER AND THE BIRDS

Last month we had a lot of snow. We usually get snow in January but there seemed to be a lot more than usual this year. Skipper just loves snow; he doesn't seem to mind being out in it even when it is snowing heavily. He can be quite fly "though" and will sometimes take a walk round the garden underneath the trees and bushes that surround it! Because he has a nice thick coat he doesn't get too cold or wet and he can stay out quite a while.

When he is outside he likes to stop and sniff and he always likes to watch the birds. On summer days he will lie for ages and watch them flying about and hopping on the branches. Even in this cold weather he always takes time to look and see what they are up to. He gets quite excited when we fill the bird feeders and takes a great interest as if to ensure we are doing it correctly! The robin, who is around a lot at the moment, will now hop around him. He seems to know Skipper will do him no harm. It is very special to have lots of different birds in the garden. There are so many different kinds: some large and some tiny; some very colourful and some just plain black, but they all have a song to sing and sometimes you just feel they are singing for no other reason than that God has given them a voice to praise him and to gladden our hearts. Like the rest of creation they have been very wonderfully made and when we see them we should always remember that they show us just how great the Lord is.

Do you like to sing? Perhaps you don't think you are very good and are quite shy about singing out loud. Many of us are a bit like that but that shouldn't stop us trying. It is important to sing praise to God. We use our voices for so many other things: some of them not very good things, but we are very slow to praise God. We are not usually so slow when it comes to praising ourselves or others whom we like. We have an opportunity every time we go to church to sing to the Lord and it is important to do our best and join in with everyone else. The Bible talks about making melody in our hearts and we can do that even if we are not the best singers in the world. It's not how good our voices are, but rather what is in our hearts that is most important. If we

Skipper's Tales



are singing to God to praise him and show our love for him, it doesn't matter whether we have a beautiful voice like the blackbird who sits on the roof and sings his beautiful song or whether we sound more like the chirpy cheeky wee robin. What matters is that we praise God.

From the Editor

Dear friends,

I wonder if you have ever received a gift which you never used? I don't mean that you didn't like it. In fact you might have liked it a lot. The problem was that you thought it was too nice to spoil and deserved to be kept just as it was. Sometimes we feel like that when someone has gone to a great deal of effort to make a special cake. It is so well decorated that it seems a terrible shame to plunge in a knife and cut it up. However, surely, that is to miss the point? The cake wasn't made just to be admired: but to be enjoyed. The gift wasn't intended to sit in its box on a shelf looking shiny and new: it was meant to be useful.

Our Bibles can be a little like that. Perhaps you have a special one which you received as a prize or maybe it belonged to someone in the family and you look after it very well. It's certainly good to look after things very carefully but we have to be careful that we don't forget that they are there for our use. Maybe you admire that special Bible and you would be upset if it got damaged or lost but I wonder if you use it as much as you should? Is it kept nice and neat inside the box when it should be out and open beside your bed?

It is exactly the same for the lessons we find in the Bible. We may believe them and treat them with some respect but that doesn't mean that we obey them or practise them in our lives. Sadly we can be like the person who keeps the present in the shiny wrapper but never puts it to any use. In the Bible we find the greatest source of wisdom, riches and life. Don't lose out on these precious gifts by failing to open, believe and obey the Word of God!

Murdo A N Macleod

Let's meet a Christian PE teacher!

Thank you John for kindly agreeing to be interviewed for the *Explorer*. Perhaps we can begin by learning a little about where you come from and your family.

I have lived in Staffin on the Isle of Skye all my life, apart from four years at Edinburgh University. I have been blessed to have been brought up in a God-fearing home in a community that has known much of the Lord's blessing in times past. I attended Sabbath school from the age of five and my mother and father tried to set a good example to myself and my sister, and this has stayed with me until this day. I now try to do the same with my own family. I was blessed with a wife (Caroline) in 2008 and shortly after we had 3 children, Archie who is now eight, and our twins Rebecca and George who are now five. We built a house and I also run a small croft!

When did you become a Christian?

Over a period of time I had a growing sense of being a sinner in need of Christ as Saviour. I was asking questions of my mother who became a Christian when I was a child. I read some testimonies on the church website and of course the Bible itself. As time passed I also had a growing sense that my life was no longer my own; it was the Lord's. I can remember phoning our Minister, Mr. Kemp, after wrestling with all of this on the Saturday of the communion. It was this phone call that confirmed what I suspected, reminding me particularly of the promises of God's Word. This was at our September Communion in 2011.

John and his wife Caroline

John with his three young children

I can also say that right through my life I can see the dealings of the Lord with me. I can see them in the opportunities I was given in being taught in my youth right through to the restraint I have always felt through my teenage years into adulthood. I did commit sins knowing I was doing so, and outside influences at University were pulling me away, but all of the time there was that restraint of conscience and even a lack of any real enjoyment in the pleasures of this world.

I also saw God's hand in giving me a girlfriend who was willing and happy to come out to attend church with myself and my parents in Staffin. Up until that point I was not really attending the means of grace as often as I should have, and if it wasn't for her willingness to attend with me I may not have found the Lord at all... soon after we got engaged!

You are a Physical Education teacher. Was that what you always wanted to be?

No, not at all. When I was young all I wanted to be was a Policeman. I think it was my clear sense of right and wrong that first led to this interest. I did my 3rd year work experience with the Police in Portree, which further whetted my appetite. The Inspector there recommended that prior to joining the police I should do something else first, such as getting a degree. It was only after that I really started to consider being a teacher of Physical Education. I have stuck with this of course!

Kayaking on a calm day

What age groups do you work with?

I teach both primary and secondary pupils aged between five and eighteen. Different age groups have their challenges and rewards. I do find teaching Primary children particularly rewarding. They generally listen better and are more willing to learn.

I'm sure that in your work you will find the need for Christian principles such as fairness and honesty coming up a great deal. I suppose that is a witness in its own way isn't it?

Yes, very much so. We were all the same I am sure, but there are always those children who like to win, take shortcuts, cheat and so on. I always try to demonstrate that honesty is the best policy and that cheaters never win. I also try and show them that we need to be supportive and encouraging, we are to love one another and to care for our neighbour as ourselves. I am a very relaxed person and I believe that this, alongside patience, helps in the work. Some try to take advantage and soon realise that though I am fair I am also firm!

Do you see things in the children's lives and conduct, both good and bad, which provide lessons for you in your own Christian life?

With societal changes there are so many difficult issues that arise within schools. There are many needy children who come from broken families and have very difficult lives. It is no wonder that some struggle in school not just with the work, but with the structure of the school day, rules and so on. These children often just need a helping hand, some structure in their lives and good examples. This is when I feel that consistency and a caring nature are of the utmost importance. I also see children who come from homes where they do get a relatively good example from parents; some attend church. Often it is these children that show the most respect and are generally more polite, mannerly, better citizens if you like. This shows the results of society turning away from the things of God and is a constant lesson to myself.

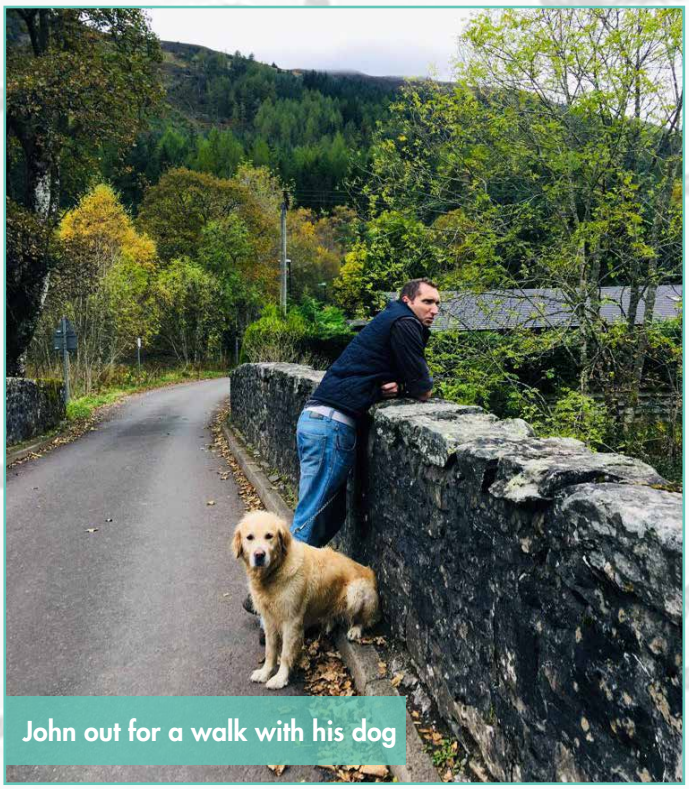
Unfortunately sport has been one of these areas through which the Lord's Day has been broken and cast aside in our nation. I'm sure that saddens you and I know you would encourage all young people to remember that there is one race and one prize to which we must give the first place.

Yes, these things do sadden me a great deal. There is so much living for the here and now in our day. You mention to people that they should be remembering the Lord on the Sabbath, not enjoying themselves in things that are not of the Lord and all you get is abuse. You are told that you are just a 'spoil sport' and so on. We are to remember that this race here below is really just a sprint. The finish line is in eternity. Those in Christ are the real winners. Those who do these things on the Sabbath are losing the race.

Even in my profession there are courses that we are to attend. Sometimes these fall on the Lord's Day. I have always refused to attend and tried to set an example to my fellows. Sometimes they ask why, and I will tell them about the Sabbath day and why it is special. Sometimes they don't ask and I suspect some of them already know the reason but have chosen to ignore it and instead try to conform to the day we are living in.

What final word of advice would you give *Explorer* readers?

When I was younger I used to envy other children who didn't have to go to church. How wrong I was! So I would say to the readers of the Explorer not to take for granted what they have. Value your spiritual blessings and opportunities and don't try to compromise. While you are still young, cry to the Lord Jesus Christ the words of Luke 18:13 "**God be merciful to me a sinner**".



John out for a walk with his dog

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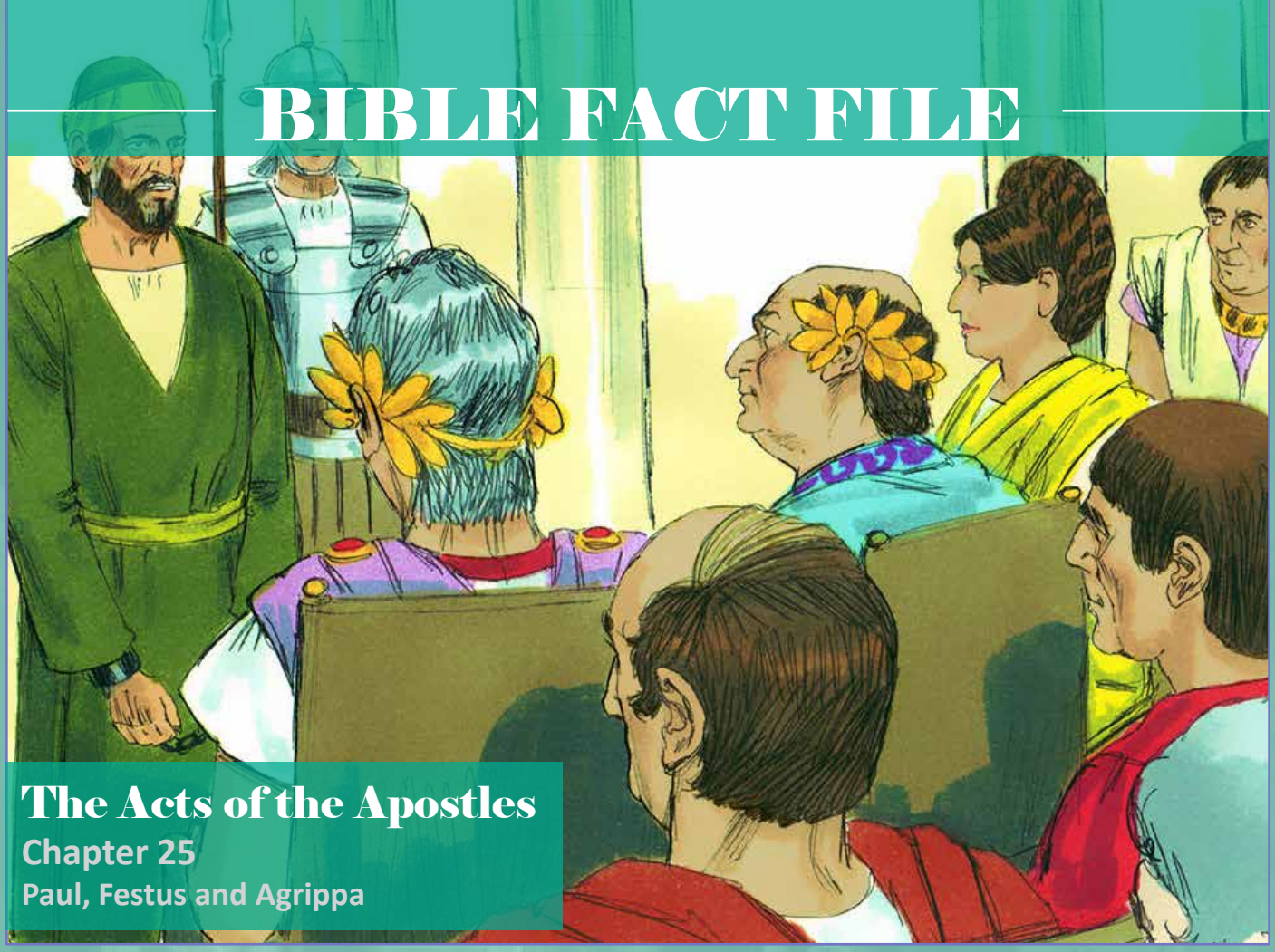

The Acts of the Apostles
Chapter 25
Paul, Festus and Agrippa

The previous chapter ended with Paul being left in prison by the selfish and greedy former Governor. In this chapter things take another important turn as a new Governor, Festus, gets involved in Paul's case.

PAUL IS OBLIGED TO APPEAL TO CAESAR (vv 1 - 12)

As soon as the new Governor arrived the Jewish leaders again complained about Paul. They hoped that Festus would hold a court in Jerusalem so that they might have an opportunity of killing Paul there. Festus at first refused and called them to appear before him in Caesarea. They again put charges against Paul but, as before, they were not able to prove any of them. However, Festus, like Felix before him, wanted to stay on good terms with the Jewish rulers. He asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem for another trial. Paul knew this was dangerous and unjust and he appealed to Caesar, the Emperor in Rome, who was the final and chief judge in the Empire. Festus had no legal choice but to accept this appeal and send the prisoner to Rome. All of this reminds us that Satan and the enemies of the Gospel do not give up easily and while that would have, perhaps, discouraged Paul, no-one knew better than himself that the Lord is able to make enemies into friends and no doubt he prayed for that, and so should we.

GATHERING INFORMATION FOR THE TRIAL IN ROME (vv 13 - 27)

While all of this was going on, another couple got involved with Paul. King Agrippa II was the great-grandson of the Herod who had killed the babies in Bethlehem. He would be the last of the Herodian kings to rule. He came to visit Festus along with his sister Bernice. Festus asked them to come with him to a meeting with Paul.

At the meeting Festus was amazed that Paul believed Christ was still alive (v19) and that the Jews regarded this as a crime punishable by death! Sadly the chapter shows us that Festus was guilty of hypocrisy. In verse 25 he says that he did not believe Paul was guilty of any crime deserving death. Why then did he not do the right thing and use his power to release him? He also told Agrippa and Bernice that Paul had appealed to Caesar but failed to mention that he was appealing against Festus' own decision! He did not tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. This is often the case and it is a sin we must watch out for. We are very good at twisting things to suit ourselves but God sees it all and one day we will have to answer for these things.

It is interesting that in all these twists and turns in Paul's situation he comes into contact with some of the most important people of the day who are given an opportunity, by the Lord, to hear the Gospel. Next month we shall hear more about Festus and Agrippa as Paul's audience with them continues in chapter 26.

WHO IS BLESSED?

Blessed are the _____

Blessed are they that _____ keep

Blessed are they who _____ after righteousness

Blessed is the man that _____ the Lord aright

Blessed are those who _____ in the Lord's most holy way

Blessed are they who _____ the living God

Blessed are the _____ in heart

Blessed are they who _____ after righteousness

Choose from:

Fears | Hunger | Judgement | Peacemakers | Pure | Seek | Thirst | Walk

Latest entries

1st prize - Aletheia Beers

Runners up

Stornoway - Sarah Craig, Thomas Craig
Partick - Kenny MacKinnon Scourie - Michelle Ross
Ness - Heidi MacLeod

Name: .....

Age: .....

Congregation: .....

Address: .....

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THE STOLEN CHOCOLATE

I thought my little sister was playing 'Guess which hand'. She seemed to be doing what Dad does when he plays the game with her. He places something in each hand, so no matter which hand she chooses - when he takes it from behind his back, she's always right, and Dad makes such a fuss about how clever she is. It looked like my sister understood his trick because she had a piece of chocolate in each hand.

But then I noticed her tears, this wasn't a game. Dad was asking if she should have taken chocolate that wasn't hers. She didn't say a word, but she looked very sorry and just shook her head sadly. I later realised she couldn't have spoken because her mouth was so full of chocolate. While Dad was speaking to her she kept both her hands firmly behind her back, and when it seemed that Dad was reaching the end of the lecture she started to back away toward our bedroom. She was careful not to turn around and crept backwards, sort of sliding along the wall.

The sad and sorry look was still on her face, though for just a moment I thought I could see in her eyes a glint of determined defiance. I don't think Dad was fooled for a moment as it was pretty obvious what she was up to. When Dad said, "Give me the rest of the chocolate", she stopped shuffling backward and froze to a stop, then slowly and reluctantly she brought forward the hand that had the smallest piece. As she surrendered this to Dad she started to creep backward again.

When Dad asked what was in the other hand, the floodgates opened and she started bawling. There had been no sound from her until now, and she normally can't be doing anything unless it is at top volume, but she made up for that silence now! As she bawled, more and more chocolate tumbled and slipped down her chin. She looked utterly dejected.

"Isn't the chocolate nice?" asked Dad. She shook her head sadly. Wide eyes filled with tears, she tried to say "No" and from her mouth flooded even more chocolate. "Isn't it strange" said Dad, as he removed the second, and significantly larger slab, of chocolate from her other hand, "how stolen chocolate never tastes as good as you thought it would?"

Later that evening at family worship Dad read from Genesis about Adam and Eve taking the forbidden fruit. Dad explained that instead of satisfying them, as they thought it would, by doing what was wrong everything everywhere in this world became spoilt. "But God's mercy is great", said Dad, "so he still permits us to enjoy very many things - if only we don't further spoil them with further sin". Then to my sister he added, "Chocolate is a gift from God, but we can only fully enjoy this gift when we receive it, not when we try to steal it."

After worship, for a special treat before bed, we were given a chocolate biscuit with our cup of milk. My sister, who swallowed it in two bites, said that it was the best supper ever.