**Should Christians Rejoice in the deliberate Targeting of Babies as an act of Vengeance?**

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy *shall he be,* that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.  (9)  Happy *shall he be,* that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

***Psalm 137:8-9***

OCCASIONAL NOTES

Winter 2023/2024

S t r a n g e r s R e s t E v a n g e l i c a l C h u r c h

Psalm 137:8-9 is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible because on the face of it, this passage might suggest that it is biblical for a nation that has been attacked and whose children have been deliberately targeted to desire that the offending nation should suffer the same fate ie that it would be right to desire that their children should be targeted and destroyed as well.

They shot a Baby – Hamas attack survivor

On 7th October the world witnessed Israel’s 9/11 moment. The civilised world looked on with horror at reports of babies deliberately being targeted by the Hamas terrorists and shot multiple times in cold blood. A literal reading of this verse might imply that in the case of the war in Gaza Israel might be justified in deliberately seeking out little children to kill them in retaliation for the senseless murder of children in Israel on 7th October – an event that rightly horrified us all.

Indeed you may recall that it was recently reported that former US diplomat Stuart Deldowitz said to a halal food vendor in New York, in relation to the Hamas attack on 7th October, that if the Israelis killed 4,000 Palestinian children that wasn’t enough”. The comment rightly caused outrage in the media. One wonders whether Stuart Deldowitz had in mind this Psalm when he made this extraordinary comment.

So how should we interpret this verse in the light of the whole counsel of God?

The first thing to note is that in these verses we are dealing with Israel when it represented the kingdom of God on earth. It should also be remembered that David was the sweet psalmist of Israel and a very godly man as we shall see.

# John Calvin on Psalm 137:8-9

1. John Calvin, in The Complete Biblical Commentary Collection, says of these two verses:- ‘It may seem to  savour of cruelty, that he should wish the tender and innocent infants to be dashed and mangled upon the stones, but he does not speak under the impulse of personal feeling, and only employs words which God had  himself authorized, so that this is but the declaration of a just   judgment, as when our Lord says,    "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."   (Matthew 7:2.)    Isaiah (*Isaiah 13:16 - Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished*) had issued a special prediction in reference to   Babylon, which the Psalmist has doubtless here in his eye -- "Behold God has sharpened the iron, and bent the bows; he sends forth the Medes and Persians, which shall not regard silver and gold; they shall thirst for blood only," etc.’   (Proverbs 27:17).
2. John Calvin emphasises that the psalmist is only using words authorised by God himself in respect of the Babylonians. Those words were written in Isaiah 13:16 so these were not the idle words of men. It should not be forgotten either that the Medes and Persians were later judged for their wickedness by Alexander the Great.

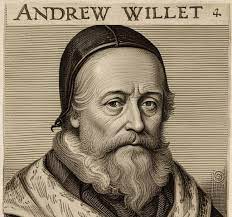
# The Primacy of the First Table of the 10 Commandments over the Second

1. In the Old Testament there were at times direct commands by God to put certain people to death which would be quite foreign to New Testament times. Obeying a command given directly by God was plainly lawful and could attract no divine retribution.
2. For example, Jehu was ordered to destroy the House of Ahab (2 Kings 9:7:- “And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel.” On the face of it, this looked like murder but obviously it could not have been.

As John Gill remarked about God’s instruction to Ahab, “this was to be no objection with him to the destroying of his (Ahab’s) house, as being an act of high treason (in other words Ahab did not object to carrying out this mission on the basis that it was treason), since he had an order for it from the King of kings, and Lord of lords; which otherwise would have seemed unlawful and criminal”.

1. That time has now passed. No longer does God command judicial executions as he did in Old Testament times through his holy prophets. Only madmen nowadays purport to hear God telling them to kill people and that of course is murder (although the verdict in an English Criminal Court might well be “not guilty by reason of insanity”).
2. Another example of a divine order to kill was the order given to Saul to destroy the Amalekites by Samuel in 1 Samuel 15:1-3:- “Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee *to be* king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.  (2)  Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember *that* which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid *wait* for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt.  (3)  Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”

## Andrew Willett on Psalm 137:8-9

Andrew Willett (1562-1621), an English Clergyman, wrote a commentary on 1 Samuel. His comment on this verse is helpful:-

God’s justice appeared herein, who punisheth the wickedness of the fathers in their ungodly posterity: as their fathers had afflicted Israel, so their seed still continued enemies to God’s people: therefore because they abused God’s long-suffering and patience, the Lord justly giveth them over, and all that belongeth unto them to the sword. *Osiand.* 2. Besides, it pleased God to make this an example of his vengeance upon those, which deal cruelly with his people: *Genevens.* that as in a Commonwealth severity is justly shewed upon some, that all may receive warning by it; so the Lord in the administration of the great Commonwealth of the world, doth exemplify some for the instruction of others. 3. And as for Saul, it was no cruelty in him to execute God’s commandment: for although the second table say, *Thou shalt not kill,* yet because the second table is subordinate to the first, he is not guilty of killing, whom the Lord biddeth kill, whom we are commanded in the first table to obey: *Borr.* like as the inferior minister and executioner of justice, transgresseth not the law, being appointed by the Magistrate to doe it. 4. So Saul thought it no cruel part, to put them all to the sword; first because they were professed enemies to the Church of God, secondly because the Lord had so commanded. *Ioseph. lib.* 6. *cap.* 8.

1. This is the crucial point. Saul was ordered to kill by God himself and that is what made the order lawful. We no longer live in such days when God gives such orders because we live in New Testament times and the canon of God’s word is complete:- As we read in Hebrews 1:1-2  God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,  (2)  Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.

# Children Not Punished for Sins of their Parents

1. It would therefore be contrary to scripture to use Psalm 137:8-9 to justify generally and in all ages the killing of infants by an army as a result of any kind of imputed collective national guilt because it is contrary to the principle, expressed in 2 Kings 14:6, “that the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers.”; also Ezekiel 18:2 (Ezekiel 18:2:- “What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?”). In 2 Kings 14:6 we read that Amaziah expressly refrained from killing the children of the servants who murdered his father because of this principle.
2. It is also contrary the Lord’s declaration in Ezekiel 18 (v32): “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn *yourselves,* and live ye.” If the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked then God’s children can have no pleasure either.
3. Howard Osgood wrote an article called “Dashing the Little Ones Against the Rock” ([*The Princeton Theological Review*](https://commons.ptsem.edu/?journal-id=ptr), Volume 1, Issue 1 (1903):- “When the Old or New Testament speaks of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, we must always remember that no child was ever punished by God simply for his father's sin, but because he chose his father’s sins rather than the grace of God and increased in the depravity of his father. This is the re-iterated testimony of Old and New Testaments. When the Saviour says “that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world” would be required of that generation, it was because they consented to the works of their fathers, and would not turn to God. In the destruction of Babylon related in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, all who sought God are warned to flee from her before she was dashed in pieces. All who chose. Babylon, its pride and power, rather than God, were dashed to pieces with her. Just as Jerusalem’s children, turning from Christ, were dashed to pieces with her (in AD 70), while those who turned to Christ escaped from her coming ruin.

What, then, does "Blessed shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy children by the stones” mean? Since it was God who was to dash Babylon and her progeny to pieces, and this verse is part of a prayer to God, it means blessed shall every one be whom God shall use to destroy to the uttermost Babylon and her children that chose and followed in her sins. She was the mountain-high corrupting power of the world, defiant of God and the oppressor of all who loved God and righteousness and holiness. In her was found the blood of the saints and the prophets, Rev. 17:6, 18:21.”

Plainly Howard Osgood looked to a spiritual fulfilment of these verses.

1. Another reason for being careful about how to interpret Psalm 137:8-9 is that it might suggest that Christians desire the destruction of little children which would be contrary to the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 9:54-5 (asking him to call down fire from heaven):-  “(54) And when his disciples James and John saw *this,* they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?  (55)  But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.”
2. It also breaches the principle in Matthew 5:44 :- “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”;
3. Any idea that this verse could be taken literally is in danger of distracting us from the spiritual nature of our enemy as expressed in (1) Ephesians 6:12:- “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places.*)”; and (2) 2 Corinthians 10:5:- “For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds”;

# The Death of Children in War

1. The world acknowledges the general principle in war that the death of children is only ever unintended or alternatively unavoidable collateral damage. To take Psalm 137:8-9 too literally could mean that the pilots of the British bombers who bombed German cities could be singled out for praise for having dropped bombs on children and likewise the pilots who dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – praised for the unavoidable collateral damage being the death of children which would be considered grotesque by right thinking people. It would make the children of this world wiser than the children of light which would be quite wrong.
2. The Christian never takes pleasure in the death of anybody least of all those who are not directly responsible for acts of murder.
3. In addition to the points already made, such a doctrine is inconsistent with the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 19:14:-  “But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

# Governments Permitted by God to use Force to Restrain Evil

1. Justification of the use of force by Governments to restrain evil is found in the New Testament in Romans 13:4:- “For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil.” While this verse does consider the State as “a revenger” on behalf of God, this cannot include the deliberate killing of children as an act of national vengeance. Rather the principle should be for a nation to do the minimum necessary to defend itself and restrain evil.
2. A nation is after all, only a collection of individuals (James 4:1:- “From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they* not hence, *even* of your lusts that war in your members?”). In the same way, it is not justified for one nation to take revenge against another. The principle of a godly nation is that it will exhibit restraint in the face of provocation and not respond in kind (Micah 6:8- “He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”). Showing mercy is the mark of a Christian nation.

# Vengeance is Mine Saith The Lord

1. You will recall the principle that “vengeance is mine”, that is God’s. We first read of it in Deuteronomy 32:35:- “To me *belongeth* vengeance, and recompence”. We also find it in the NT: Romans 1:19-20:- “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.  (20)  Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.” Verse 20 is taken from Proverbs 25:21-22:-  “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:  (22)  For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.”
2. This principle remains true at a national as well as a personal level. National rulers, while carrying God’s authority to restrain evil must not play God. The Prince of Tyre made this error (Ezekiel 28:2:- “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart *is* lifted up, and thou hast said, I *am* a God, I sit *in* the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou *art* a man, and not God…”).  Herod is another example of what happens when that occurs (Acts 12:23).
3. This is not to say that a nation that deliberately targets innocent children will not be visited by some judgment of God to punish it. That is why nations that permit abortion leave themselves open to the judgment of God but how God might exercise such punishment is part of his secret and not revealed will. Recently Lord Walker died. He was one of the Law Lords that presided over the conjoined twins case in 2001 where the House of Lords upheld the Court of Appeal’s decision, resisted by the twins’ Roman Catholic parents, to divide the twins so that Marie died but Jodie survived and is still living today. Shortly after the CA decided this case one of the Lords Justice of Appeal lost one of his twin daughters in a freak accident in South Africa. Was this a visitation of divine displeasure against the decision he took? All we can say is that it may have been – the Day of Judgment will reveal it but it could never be that a person in his own capacity or a national government would be justified in visiting such retribution.

# Rights Before God

1. We must remember that none of us, including children, have any rights before God. We see this in Luke 13:1-5:-

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.  (2)  And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?  (3)  I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.  (4)  Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?  (5)  I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

1. What the Roman soldiers did was plainly wholly unjustifiable but that wasn’t the point. Those soldiers will be brought to account for their wickedness on the day of Judgment. The question the disciples asked was why God permitted these atrocities assuming it was because they were particularly grievous sinners. They looked beyond the Roman soldiers to the God who permitted this wickedness. We have to understand that God permits terrible atrocities to remind the human race that it is fallen, dead in trespasses and sins, and under the wrath of God (Romans 1:18) with no rights of its own – a terrible warning of the judgment to come. We have seen that the destruction of the Amalekites and Babylonians (including their babies) has to be seen in this light and not as a justification for nations to respond in kind deliberately to take the lives of babies merely as an act of retaliation.
2. Babies are as much tainted by sin as we are (Psalm 51:5:- “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”). They have no more right to live than we have in the eyes of God. When they do die we are reminded of the terrible judgment of God against sin that even a baby who has committed no wilful sin is nevertheless subject to death.
3. Hence we are driven to say, when babies die, in whatever circumstances, along with Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed by the name of the Lord.” Thankfully, along with David we have the hope that we will see that baby again:- 2 Samuel 12:23:- I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

# Cautions on Imprecatory Prayers

1. There are some cautions generally about applying imprecatory prayers taken from *Theologia Reformata*, Vol 2, by John Edwards of Cambridge (1637-1716) from his exposition of Matthew 6:12:- And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
   1. We never pray against private enemies. Even David did not do that as we see in Psalm 35 and 38:
      1. Psalm 35:12-15:-  They rewarded me evil for good *to* the spoiling of my soul.  (13)  But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing *was* sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.  (14)  I behaved myself as though *he had been* my friend *or* brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth *for his* mother.  (15)  But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: *yea,* the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew *it* not; they did tear *me,* and ceased not:
      2. Psalm 38:13-22:-  “But I, as a deaf *man,* heard not; and *I was* as a dumb man *that* openeth not his mouth.  (14)  Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth *are* no reproofs.  (15)  For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.  (16)  For I said, *Hear me,* lest *otherwise* they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify *themselves* against me.  … (19)  But mine enemies *are* lively, *and* they are strong: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied.  (20)  They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow *the thing that* good *is.*  (21)  Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me.  (22)  Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation.”
   2. This is consistent with NT teaching (Matthew 5:44:- “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you”);
   3. Imprecations should only be used against public enemies who are incorrigible (hardened or incurable) enemies. David prayed for the confusion of his enemies so they would repent and be converted (Psalm 83:16-17:- “Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name, O Lord”); Peter wished that Simon Magus might perish but it was conditional on his not repenting (Acts 8:20&22); In Galatians 5:12 Paul wished that the seducers that troubled the Galatians “were cut off”. He could only meant it of those who obstinately continued in their wicked course who by their impenitence had declared themselves reprobates. This is not inconsistent with forgiving those who have done us private injuries;
   4. Those that desire that evil may fall on the implacable enemies of God must only do so for God’s glory – that his name may be exalted and not for our own glory or for our ambition or pride or to satisfy our private revenge and malice;
   5. When praying for judgments on the enemies and opposers of the Gospel we do it entirely in submission to God’s will. We refer the whole matter to the Lord’s pleasure and final disposal;
   6. Finally, no imprecation should extend to the final state of the soul of an enemy of God. We have the example of the Lord Jesus and the first martyr, Stephen who asked mercy for those that put them to death:
      1. Luke 23:34:- “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots”;
      2. Acts 7:60:- “And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

None of us know whether in the last moment of life even men like Adolf Hitler may have turned from their sins. The conversion of cruel tyrants like Nebuchadnezzar proves this point.

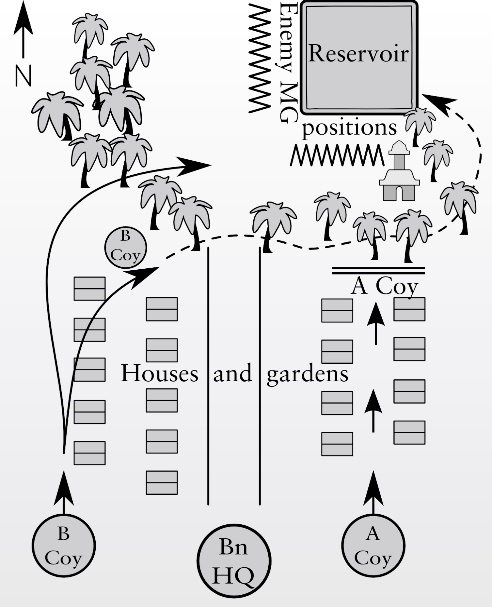
.**Rev Major Joe Mullins MC**

16th July 1920 to 2nd December 2023

As I write this edition of Occasional Notes, I am in Australia, following the funeral of my father’s second cousin who was a great influence in my Christian life over the 40 years that I had the privilege of knowing him. Joe spoke at Strangers Rest in 2016 when he came over to the UK to take my father’s funeral aged 96. His life story is a remarkable testimony to God’s providence an so I felt it should be told here.

Gazing at the two gaping holes in his helmet where Japanese bullets had penetrated the steel and the dent where a bullet had bounced off, it was as if Major Joe Mullins heard the voice of God saying to him, “Joe, you’ve no right to be alive. Your only right to live, is to give yourself back to me”. The date was 28th July 1945 and Mullins was commanding B Company of the First Battalion, The Queen’s Royal Regiment (West Surrey) in Burma. The Battalion was part of 33 Corps of Lieutenant General Sir William Slim’s 14th Army. Rangoon (now Yangon) had been captured on 6th May 1945 cutting off the Japanese 28th Army which then tried to escape to Thailand over the Sittang River. The Queen’s had orders to cut off the retreating Japanese forces despite being at half company strength (down to 60 from 120) mainly due to malaria and dysentery.

The Battalion had occupied a village called Letpanthonbyin. Leaving a skeleton force behind in the village, A and B companies (all that was left of the Battalion) were ordered to carry out a night fighting patrol to cut the Pegu-Martaban railway line along which it was believed the retreating Japanese were marching. Balancing on slippery paddy bunds (about 10cm above the flooded paddy fields) in the dark was no joke. They did not find the enemy that night and returned weary the next morning, 27th July, to discover that a Japanese force was now occupying the village. They received orders to retake the village from Brigade Headquarters. The enemy numbered at least 50 and had dug in, in the north half of the village.

The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel John Terry, ordered A Company on the right and Mullins’ B Company on the left to advance and drive out the enemy who were dug in behind a mud bank reservoir. The attack was delayed until the afternoon to allow the troops to rest and also because of friendly artillery fire which had caused casualties in A company. Mullins was ordered to put in the final attack with covering fire from A Company. The citation for Mullins’ Immediate Military Cross stated that the companies “went in with bullet and bayonet. They suffered casualties all the way and were under continual Jap fire but Major Mullins with complete disregard for personal safety and showing magnificent endurance and bravery kept his men going. They had cleared three quarters of the Jap positions when they came to the final pocket of resistance round a water tank with a heavy machine gun and a light machine gun.” Mullins took up the story of what happened next. “Tiny Taylor, my Second-in-Command, was wounded and also my runner. Crouching behind the large mango tree (from which Mullins had been directing the attack), I called up Sergeant Everett and two other seasoned men and shared with them my plan, to crawl across A Company’s front, round the Buddhist Temple, to reach the bank of the reservoir on the East side…. So, as dusk fell with what ammunition and grenades we could muster we set off (see dotted line).” By the time they reached the temple, darkness had fallen. Using grenades and bursts of Sten gun fire they leapfrogged from tree to tree arriving under the bank of the reservoir. Mullins’ citation continued: “It was dark by now and only the muzzle flashes showed the Japanese positions. Major Mullins and four of his men, although with only a few rounds left, crawled right close in under the Jap fire, got on a corner of the tank and shot them off. During this crawl Major Mullins was shot twice through his steel hat… But for Major Mullins’ extreme bravery and powers of leadership the final pocket would not have been cleared and the whole Battalion would have had to start again in the morning. His very gallant determination decided the day.”

Mullins’ actions resulted in his group being cut off from the rest of the Battalion which had been ordered to withdraw when night fell. They spent the night with the remainder of the fanatical Japanese fighters just yards away from them. However, between 2 and 3am they heard a great commotion at the northern end of the reservoir as the remaining Japanese forces prepared to move. For Mullins and his small party their intentions were unclear. If it was down the bund towards them, that would have been the end but to their great relief and in answer to their prayers the Japanese retreated across the paddy fields to the east, helped in their flight by a few volleys from Mullins’ party.

Mullins then waited until first light before advancing on the deserted Japanese positions. They found them empty except for the British prisoners that the Japanese had left behind, who they released. They then marched down the village street singing songs like “Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile…” so they would not be confused with the enemy. It was at this point that Mullins realised that his helmet felt heavier than usual and he discovered the miraculous deflection of the Japanese bullets.

Mullins described how they missed him in the following words: “One bullet entered the top of my helmet, ran round and came out the back. The path of the bullet can still be seen in the helmet. I was crouching behind this mango tree and the second bullet in the side of my helmet burst open, ran around inside and came out the other side. So it actually came in near one ear and out near the other. The third one ricocheted off.”

The historian of 7 Indian Division, Brigadier MR Roberts DSO, in his account of this battle (its last of the War) wrote:

“Between the wars the Queen’s in India had built up a reputation for soldierly bearing and smartness. Crowds used to watch their guard-mounting parades in Delhi, individual soldiers on leave in hill stations were usually turned out as if they might meet the Sergeant-Major round the next corner. In fact, the Queen’s were rather proud of the Queen’s … This discipline and soldierly bearing was still there in spite of the mud, sweat and overpowering tiredness, and they carried the position at the point of the bayonet, at a cost of twenty five casualties, a noteworthy performance on the part of very tired men against a well-dug-in and determined enemy.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Joe Mullins was born at Chevington Grove near Bury St Edmonds on 16th July 1920. A direct descendant of his great great grandfather was Charles Herbert Mullins VC (who won the Victoria Cross commanding a Squadron of dismounted Imperial Light Horse during the Second Boer War at Elandslaagte in 1899). He was called Joe because previous Mullinses (including the founder of Preshute House at Marlborough College) had been nick-named Joe after the 19th Century prize-fighter of that name. His father Hugh Mullins was a Chartered Accountant who had served in the Finance Department in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan until Joe was about three when he returned to England to be with the family. He had an elder sister, Jean and a younger sister Peggy. Mullins was educated at Marlborough College where, at the age of 17, he attended a Scripture Union Camp where, in his words, “he was found by the Saviour”. After leaving school at 18 he went out to the Kenya Highlands to work on his uncle (John Etherington)’s farm on the Kinangop Plateau, until war broke out in September 1939. His uncle commented that he didn’t think his heart was in farming – he had other aspirations – although he did all that was asked of him willingly and efficiently.

Returning to Britain he enlisted as a “Private Gentleman” in the Fifth Special Reserve Battalion, Scots Guards, and, on Saturday, 2nd March 1940, embarked by ship to France to train in arctic warfare in Chamonix. At short notice they had to pack up and return by train and were given orders to embark on ships in Greenock, Scotland, expecting to deploy to the Finnish border in Norway. However no sooner had they embarked than mercifully the operation was aborted. Mullins next attended Sandhurst. The Academy Adjutant was Major Blundell-Hollingsworth-Blundell. Mullins told the story of the cadet who was posted as one of the night sentries. Seeing someone approach, the cadet called out: “Halt, who goes there”, to which the Adjutant drew himself up and replied curtly: “Major Blundell-Hollingsworth-Blundell”. Thinking he was answering on behalf of himself and two companions the cadet replied, “Advance, one and be recognised!”. History does not relate the Adjutant’s reply.

After Sandhurst, Mullins was commissioned into the Queen’s Royal Regiment as a Second Lieutenant. Following a brief posting to Yorkshire to defend the beaches against possible invasion, the Battalion was deployed to Peshawar (now Pakistan). In 1942 he was with the Battalion in the Arakan when his company commander was wounded. Considered too young and inexperienced to take over, Mullins was sent to a reinforcement camp in Assam. He was later part of the relief force that trekked over the mountains to Kohima and then joined the advance through Burma down the Irrawaddy River. At the Battle of Yenenchaung, Mullins picked up a Japanese flag which is still in the family.

Following the Battle of Letpanthonbyin, Mullins spent eight weeks in hospital in Pegu with infected legs from leach bites sustained while marching through paddy fields. He had time to reflect that up until this point he had been “following Jesus afar off” and it was time to recommit his life to serving the Lord Jesus fully. He therefore resolved to apply for ordination in the Church of England. Following repatriation and demobilisation he completed an MA in Theology at Trinity College, Oxford also gaining a Hockey Blue in the 1947/48 season. He then went to Cambridge to Ridley Hall to do his pastoral training. He served as a curate from 1949-1951 at St Paul’s Portman Square in London. In 1952 Mullins travelled to India to work with the Children’s Special Service Mission until 1962. In June 1955, he met Edith Helen Gooding (from St Philip, Barbados) in Laundaur, North India while Edith was at language school learning Hindi. They first met on the way to a dinner party walking up a steep hill. Shortly afterwards they met again at the post office. Then at a prayer meeting Mullins heard Edith pray and realised this was the woman he wanted to marry. Due to strict missionary rules they had to rely on written correspondence until Edith had finished her initial period of service.

They were married at All Saints Cathedral, Allahabad on 5th December 1956 and had six children, Ruth, a teacher and Anglican Minister in Melbourne, Jennie a registered midwife in Canberra, Chris General Service Manager of Volvo, Canberra, Rachel a registered nurse in Sydney, Danny, Chaplain at Macquarie University in Sydney. Finally Beth is a teacher and farmer in New Zealand. All his children survive him. All are married with their own families. Edith predeceased him in 2009.

Between 1962 and 1974 Mullins was Priest in Charge at St John’s Bangalore in South India. Every year Mullins attended a children’s camp when his helmet would come out round a camp fire and the story would be retold of his miraculous deliverance.

In July 1974 the family moved to Canberra, Australia where Mullins was senior minister at St Peter’s Anglican Church, Weston, ACT between 1974 and 1982. During this time the church went from meeting in a school to planning and beginning the construction of its own building. Mullins was the only evangelical minister in the diocese. Now nine parishes have evangelical ministers. His final post before retirement in 1989 was as Senior Minister at St Nicholas’ Anglican Church in Goulburn between 1982 and 1984.

In 1989 Mullins and his wife took a caravan round Australia, visiting outback Bush Church Aid (BCA) supported parishes.  In the 1990’s they did a locum in Jakarta and Paris and joined a mission team to teach English in Kazakhstan. They also returned to Bangalore, and visited Britain on a number of occasions (his last in 2016 aged 95, to take a cousin’s funeral), as well as regular trips to New Zealand to visit his daughter Beth and her family, the final visit aged 102 in January 2023.

In 1998 Mullins was awarded the medal of the Order of Australia by the Governor of Australia, Sir William Dean “for service to the community, particularly through the Anglican Church and as Rector of St. Peter’s Church, Weston”.

After retirement Mullins attended St Matthew’s Wanniassa where he was active in ministry, preaching until he was 99.

In recent years Mullins was in touch with a Japanese family they met in Jakarta and a Burmese missionary, Philip Aung on the Thai Burma border, who was raised near Letpanthonbyin! Mullins summed up his life’s pilgrimage in the words of Psalm 48:14:-

*‘For this God is our God for ever and ever. He will be our guide even unto death’*

**Praise and Prayer Requests**

For Praise:

* Give thanks for an inspiring visit round the British Museum for the Kids Club (and adults) with Ben Virgo (highly recommended);
* Give thanks for a lady who fosters children short-term who has started attending regularly and indicated she would like to join us;
* Give thanks for the men’s willingness and ability to take the Bible Study;
* Give thanks for three new members admitted at our last members’ meeting;
* Give thanks for the announcement of the engagement of Fionn (new member) and Phebe;
* Give thanks for our partnership with Matt Brinckley and the LCM;
* Give thanks for the visitors at our Guest Service on 10th December and especially the lady with six children who attended the morning service.

For Prayer:

* Please pray for the next addition of Occasional Notes that the issue of baptism would be clearly and faithfully explained (we are predominantly a baptist church);
* Please pray for L’s full recovery from the effects of chemotherapy (wonderfully declared cancer free last December);
* Please pray for our engagement with the local mosque at their monthly open meeting (last one was at the end of July, but there have been none since);
* Please pray for fruit from our door-to-door visitation with Matt Brinckley and LCM;
* Please pray that the lady with the six children would return and make her home at Strangers Rest and that she would be converted;
* Please pray for the Lord’s blessing on Fionn and Phebe as they prepare to marry in March and for their future together. Please pray that the Lord would guide them now they have moved to Portsmouth.

**Minister** – Mark Mullins (minister.strangersrest@gmail.com)

**Church Administrator (not attending Strangers Rest)** – Angela Baker (abaker@strangersrestmission131.onmicrosoft.com)

Strangers Rest Evangelical Church, 131 The Highway, London, E1W 2BP; 0207 488 4427.

**Services:** *Sunday Service* 11:00am and 6:30pm; *Wednesday Bible Study* 7:00pm;

*Friday Children’s Bible Club* 6:30pm, *Sunday School* 4:00pm.

**www.strangersrest.org**

1. Extract from Fighting Through to Kohima by Michael Lowry – Pen and Sword Books Ltd at p260-261. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)