

4th January

Memory verse:

Therefore **if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.** 2 Corinthians 5:17.

This text is exceedingly full of matter, and might require many treatises, and even multitudes of folios, to bring forth all its meaning. Holy Scripture is notably sententious.¹ Human teachers are given to verbiage; we multiply words to express our meaning, but the Lord is wondrously laconic; he writeth as it were in *shorthand*, and gives us much in little. One single grain of the precious gold of Scripture may be beaten out into acres of human gold leaf, and spread far and wide. A few books are precious as silver, fewer still are golden; but God's Book hath a bank note in every syllable, and the worth of its sentences it were not possible for mortal intellect to calculate.

– Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Vocabulary work and something to write

Look up the more difficult words highlighted in Spurgeon's comments on today's memory verse – and in the rest of this lesson. Do you understand his metaphor about gold leaf? Gold can be beaten so very thin that a little bit of it goes a very long way. Look at some older hardback books. If you see lettering on them that looks like gold, it is *real* gold leaf. That is, it is gold that has been beaten very thin – about 0.1 micrometre, or 4 *millionths* of an inch. The amount needed for lettering on book covers or in other applications such as china ware (see the picture on the right) is minute and therefore inexpensive. The word order in Spurgeon's last sentence is not what we would use today and the old verb endings and the new are freely mixed together, even in the same sentence (“writeth” and “gives”). We do not use the subjunctive as Spurgeon does in the last sentence often nowadays either. Try to write down what Spurgeon is saying in easier English.

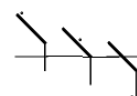


Something to do

Isaac Pitman (1813-1897) who invented Phonetic Shorthand was born on 4th January. Shorthand is a kind of writing developed for writing down every word someone is saying *as they speak* at a normal conversational speed. It is a very useful means of making a record of a speech, a sermon, a lecture or the proceedings of a law court and can be used in any other situation where what is said has to be recorded. Before the invention of sound recordings it was the only way in which such a record could be kept.

Pitman was not the first person to develop a kind of shorthand or *stenographic* writing. Thomas Shelton (c.1600-c.1650), for instance, invented the kind of shorthand which was used by Samuel Pepys in his diary.² Shelton's system used signs for each of the consonants and a moveable sign for vowels which indicated which vowel was intended by the position of the sign. Sir Isaac Newton and American President Thomas Jefferson were other famous users of his system besides Pepys. John Byrom (author of the hymn “Christians awake, salute the happy morn”) invented a similar system. The Wesley brothers used it for writing their journals although Charles' use of it was so idiosyncratic that it was more like a secret code and his journal was not deciphered until quite recently.

Pitman's system is different from these earlier shorthand systems in that it fully depends on the *sound* of the word, not the *spelling*. The shorthand is designed to be written on lined paper and the positioning of the signs is crucial. Look at the example on the right to understand this. The three words shown here are bat, bet, bit. The horizontal line is the line printed on the lined paper. The heavy slanting line is the sound “b” the



1 The word has two meanings. The first meaning is not the one used here. Look for the second meaning.

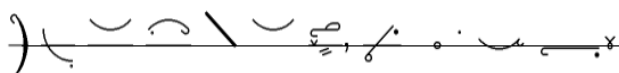
2 See lessons for December 28th and May 4th.

lighter vertical line is the sound “t” and the little dot is the vowel.

Pitman's method was an improvement that allowed trained stenographers to become very efficient. Although quite hard to learn, once mastered, Pitman's shorthand is better than any of its predecessors for speed and legibility.

When Spurgeon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle there were stenographers taking down what he said. Then they transcribed their shorthand into longhand (ordinary writing) for Spurgeon to check and send to the printer. Spurgeon generally expanded what he said before it was published each week and removed any expressions he considered “rough”. It is very interesting that one or two examples of the original stenographers' longhand transcriptions of their shorthand notes still exist. Unlike the printed sermons these give us *exactly* what Spurgeon said in the pulpit.

Here is today's memory verse in Pitman's shorthand:



Notice that instead of 43 letters and two punctuation marks to form a twelve word sentence, the stenographer only has to write twelve signs and some dots. The last shape you see is a fullstop sign. There is also a comma after “Christ” but commas are usually omitted in Pitman shorthand. Instead the stenographer often relies on leaving a larger than normal space between the words. The two little parallel lines under the sign for “Christ” indicate the capital letter but again these can be omitted if the capitalization is obvious, as it would be here. Some shorthand writers can also omit many of the vowel dots too as the words are often clear without them.

The drawback with all shorthand systems is that they have to be learned. Pitman's shorthand, though superb for the task, is hard to learn and takes time and persistence to master. It is probably only worth the effort if you are going to use it professionally. However, there are all sorts of situations where some way of recording on paper what is being said is invaluable. For someone not trained in shorthand, the only alternative is note taking.

Even without the aid of shorthand, people had been taking notes of sermons for a very long time before Spurgeon's day but not every word could be written down by ordinary note taking methods. For instance, in 1662 the best of the Church of England's ministers were thrown out of their churches. Congregations who wanted to meet apart from the Church of England were illegal and the punishments for attending such services were severe. Two sets of the farewell sermons preached by many of these ejected (thrown out) ministers were secretly published in London and, despite being illegal publications, they were very popular. The sermons were published from notes taken by various people while the sermons were being preached, which they wrote up more fully afterwards. The better the note taker, the closer the printed sermon was to the original. When the sermons were reprinted in 1962 by the Banner of Truth Trust³ it was decided to leave some of them out because they seemed so disjointed or unclear. The reason for this was that the original note takers in 1662 had not done a sufficiently good job. Being a good accurate note taker is important!

Taking notes is a skill you can make use of in everyday life. As I write this, England is going through a period that has some similarities to the situation described in the previous paragraph. Churches are closed by government order and ministers are forbidden to preach to their gathered congregations. What a lovely thing it would be if someone were able to collect together notes from the last sermons preached before the closures were enforced and print them in a book as was done in 1662!

3 Murray, Iain (ed.) *Sermons of the Great Ejection* (London, 1962)

I know that nowadays sermons can be recorded and videoed for us to see and hear. However, writing on paper has a habit of outlasting other means of preserving words.⁴ Taking notes of the sermon in church each week is a good idea. It helps you focus on what you are hearing as well as building up a collection of notes that – who knows? – may be an interesting historical document in years to come.

Test yourself to see how well you can take notes. Arm yourself with a good pencil and a notebook and get someone to read out to you the paragraph below about Archbishop James Ussher. Take notes as the paragraph is read. Be strict with yourself and do not ask the reader to slow down or repeat what they have said. This is just an experiment to demonstrate how note taking works – not a test! When you have finished, write your notes out again at once, filling in as much detail as you can remember.



Archbishop James Ussher was born on 4th January 1581. He was a brilliant historian and an expert in Hebrew. He grew up speaking Irish as a child and when he was older he collected Irish books and manuscripts. One of his first historical books was a *Discourse on the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish*. In this book he used his extensive knowledge of early Irish writings to demonstrate that the beliefs of the early Irish Christians were not at all similar to those of Roman Catholicism in his own times, but were much more biblical. Ussher was an expert in biblical languages, ancient calendars and also astronomy. He put all this to good use in his most famous book of all, *The Annals of the World* which he wrote in Latin. This massive book puts together and sorts out all the biblical and non biblical ancient

writings to produce a history of the world from Creation to AD 70, the date when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. He calculated the date of creation using the chronogenealogies of Genesis chapters 5 and 11 and by working back from the Fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians which was well known to have happened in 588BC. Ussher was one of the most learned men of his day. His calculation of the date of creation “is a perfectly reasonable deduction based on his detailed knowledge of and reverence for the Word of God.”⁵

Compare what you have written with the paragraph. Did you get the main points? Many of the actual words? Just imagine! Shorthand would enable you to write down *every word* correctly! You can see now why it has to be so different to ordinary writing.

Here are some tips for improving your note taking.

Don't attempt to write down every word. Focus on the key words and ideas. Sermon note taking is much easier than the exercise you have just done. Ministers usually repeat what they say in different words or make the same point in different ways. *You* only have to write the point down once and so the repetitions make it easier. You can make up your own specialist abbreviations. For instance if you are taking sermon notes you may not need to write “Bible” every time your minister says the word. Just a “B” would do. If you know the subject of the sermon before hand you can make some specific abbreviations. For instance before the sermon starts it may be possible to write the text, or at least the reference, at the head of the page. This may give you key words for which you could use an abbreviation. In the exercise we just did, you knew the topic was going to be “Archbishop James Ussher” so you could just use a “U” in place of his name. You can develop your own signs for common words such as “and” (+), “with” (\bar{w}). You can use mathematical signs such as \therefore . “therefore” which some note takers also turn upside down when they want to write “because”.

4 I worked for a while at the National Sound Archive in London and I can say from first hand experience that audio recordings of all types are much less durable than paper.

5 <https://creation.com/appendix-b-the-forgotten-archbishop>

These are common words in sermons and they are usually a reasoned discourse. Short hand writers never waste time using a rubber to remove mistakes and no note taker should either. If you make an error just circle it or cross it through and carry on.

If you practice taking notes of the sermon every week you will build up a useful skill for life as well as making what might turn out to be a precious record.

Some Bible history

So what was the date that Archbishop Ussher calculated for the creation of the world? If you did the lesson on 14th September you will already know that in Archbishop Ussher's day they did not use the same calendar as we do today.⁶ The calendar we now use was reformed by Pope Gregory and is therefore called the Gregorian calendar. The calendar Ussher used was devised by Julius Caesar and was therefore called the Julian calendar. Ussher arrived at the Julian date of October 22nd 4004BC by studying the Old Testament record in minute detail and calculating (he did over 100 pages of calculations) that it indicated that there were 3417-1 years between the creation and the Fall of Jerusalem in 588BC.

The lesson for 28th December includes an activity that relates to Archbishop Ussher and if you have not already done it, today would be a good day to do so. If you enjoy reading historical fiction, *Trasna na Dtonnta*, also involves Ussher and the Ireland of his times.⁷

Younger children

Younger children might like to review the difference between vowels and consonants since this difference is crucial to the story of the development of shorthand. They could try reading and writing some words with the vowels missed out or replace by dots. H.v . g. .t r.d.ng th.s, f.r .nst.nc.⁸ Blends are also dealt with differently in shorthand so these could be reviewed as well. The story of Archbishop Ussher in simple words is in the Optional Resources files for today. Reading the creation history from Genesis 1 would also be a good relevant activity.

6 <https://christianhomeeducation.weebly.com/september.html>

7 Get your copy here: <https://christinaeastwoodbooks.wordpress.com/trasna-na-dtonnta-or-a-tale-of-three-cities>

8 Have a go at reading this for instance.