

Scripture Truth

The Gospel in Job
Studies in 2 Timothy
The Writings of Jeremiah
Power for Christian Living
Lessons from the Life of Noah
A Look at Nehemiah for Today

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Editor: Gordon Hughes

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All correspondence should be addressed to:

SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications

Coopies Way, Coopies Lane, MORPETH, Northumberland NE61 6JN

Tel: 01670 511615

Fax: 01670 516620

Power for Christian Living

I. The power of faith

Gordon Kell

There is, perhaps, no greater power for good in the world today than the power of a Christ-filled life. 'Seeing is believing' holds sway in our materialistic generation. This article is a powerful reminder of the power of faith in the Christian life. It is based on a talk given on London's Premier Christian Radio.

God's picture gallery of faith

Hebrews 11 has been called God's picture gallery of faith. We are invited to look back at the lives of great men and women of God and to see the remarkable power of faith displayed in their lives. Their faith is all the more remarkable because they did not have the completed Scriptures as we do. They had no knowledge of a risen, glorified Christ as we have. They had not experienced the Holy Spirit's permanent and abiding presence as the Church has since Pentecost. Nevertheless, their lives teach us what it means simply to trust God.

What is also interesting is that the characters listed in the chapter were not without their faults. We learn from the Old Testament that they made many mistakes – sometimes big mistakes. But when their lives are recorded in this chapter, we see only their faith. Hebrews 11 is not about the *failures* of God's people but about the *faith* of God's people! This teaches us something important about how God looks upon His people. He sees us through Christ. Our Father rejoices in His children's faith and He deals quietly with our failures. It would be good if we encouraged the good we see in our fellow Christians rather than dwelling, as we sometimes do, on their failings!

In each of the characters presented in Hebrews 11, the power of faith is demonstrated in an important and distinctive way. In looking at the ways in which they trusted God, we can be helped to a more simple and direct trust in God amidst the unbelief that surrounds us in today's world.

Faith to approach God

Abel had the faith to approach God (v.4). By contrast, Cain approached God on the basis of the fruit of the land he farmed. He came to God offering the fruits of his own labour – a picture of good works. Abel, on the other hand, came to God on the basis of the substitutional death of another. Such a sacrifice was not new. When Abel's father and mother sinned and were cast out of the Garden of Eden, it was God who made the first sacrifice. He killed the animals to clothe Adam and Eve as they entered a world outside of Eden. Abel had learned, either by direct revelation or by listening to his parents, that the way to God was not on the basis of the relative goodness of his life but upon the death of another.

Abel's sacrifice points us to the sacrifice of Christ Himself who would come into the world as the Saviour and sacrifice Himself upon the cross. Christ took our place and died in our stead. He was the great substitute and is the only way to God. He could say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). We approach God in this way for salvation and we continue to approach God throughout our lives on the basis of grace. The Christ who died for us now lives for us in heaven! And we are invited to approach God through Him: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Faith to please God

Enoch had the faith to please God (v.5). Enoch is remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, because he walked with God (Genesis 5:24) or, as it says in Hebrews 11, he pleased God. Secondly, he did not die.

When Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan, the Spirit descended from heaven in the form of a dove and the Father's voice was heard from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). If the heavens opened upon our heads, what would God say? Would He be well pleased with us? Yet we all have the potential to please God. So Paul can write about the support of the Philippians as being "well pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18). Similarly, the God of peace is asked to "make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight" (Hebrews 13:20,21).

It has been said that Enoch enjoyed such a close relationship with God that one day, God said to Enoch, "Instead of going home, come to My house", and He took him home to heaven. That is a lovely way to think of how Enoch, the first man to be raptured, entered heaven without dying. It is also a telling picture of how living for God, pleasing Him, is linked to our communion with God. This is the power of faith, as v.6 tells us: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him". In an increasingly materialistic world, we are to live a life of faith, believing in an unseen God and walking in daily communion with Him throughout the whole course of our lives.

We cannot please God unless we trust Him. Enoch lived in daily communion with God. If we are to know real blessing in our lives, we must go into God's presence. Jesus said to His disciples, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Faith to serve God

Noah had the faith to serve God (v.7). He is remarkable because he served God for so long without gaining one convert. Only Noah's family went into the ark. Yet his faith remained resolute. Like Enoch, the power of his life came from walking with God. He preached righteousness although no one listened apart from his own children.

Service can sometimes seem a fruitless occupation. It can seem that no one listens or understands. The Lord Jesus had the experience of seeing little response to His own

ministry at times. But God does not assess our lives on the basis of our apparent success but upon our willingness to be faithful servants. Today we live in a world of league tables. Endless attempts are made to try to measure levels of success and, by implication, failure. God is the true Judge of our service and He judges perfectly. He alone knows the effort, tears, disappointments and trials we go through in trying to serve Him. And He values what we do for Him.

We should not forget that Noah saved his family. It is a challenge to Christians that, in our endeavour to serve others, our families are not neglected. We should always keep in balance the responsibilities we have to our children as well as to the wider the community.

Faith to obey God

Abraham had the faith to obey God (v.8). In this chapter, he is mentioned more than any other in relation to the power of faith. He simply believed God and was willing to start out on a path not knowing where it would lead him. All great men and women of faith have been able to trust God in this way. We are all called to obey God. Obedience is something many Christians struggle with. Its simplicity confounds us. But on those rare occasions when, by one circumstance or another, we are forced to have complete faith in God, we discover the joy of knowing that God really does respond to our trust in Him.

Faith to receive from God

Like Noah, Abraham's faith was shared by his wife, Sarah (v.11). In Genesis 18, Sarah laughs at the news that she would become a mother in her old age. Hardly an action of faith! But later, when Isaac, whose name means 'he laughs' is born, Sarah says, "God has made me laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me". This was the joy of faith. Sarah understood the work of God in her life and the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham in Isaac. She had the faith to receive from God and to rejoice in what He accomplished in her.

This is an important aspect of faith. We need to have the faith to receive from God. God promised to His people of old, "Prove Me now in this", says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10). The spirit of this is seen in 2 Kings 4 when Elisha asks the widow who was in debt what she has in the house. She had nothing but a jar of oil. He tells her to borrow vessels from everywhere and to fill them with the oil from the jar. She did not run out of oil, but she did run out of vessels to fill! Only then did the flow of oil stop. She had the faith to receive. We may not often think of this aspect of faith. We need to ask God to make us able to receive through faith the blessing He wants to give us.



Faith to sacrifice

We have seen that Abraham did not know where he was going when God first tested his faith. But now, v.17 recalls Genesis 22. On that occasion, God told Abraham exactly

where He wanted him to go and what He wanted him to do. Abraham had to go to the land of Moriah and sacrifice Isaac on one of the mountains there. This was the greatest test of Abraham's remarkable faith. God impressed on His dear servant that he was to take his only son, whom he loved, and sacrifice him. Abraham never questioned God. He never doubted the God who had given him a son and who now asked him to sacrifice Isaac, the one in whom all the promises of God were to be fulfilled. He had learned utterly to trust the God who had always led him in the right way. So he had the faith to sacrifice to God.

Hebrews 11 gives us a fresh insight into the Old Testament story. We read of Abraham, "accounting that God was able to raise [Isaac] up, even from the dead" (v.19). In the end, God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. The story teaches us several important things: that true faith rests entirely upon God; that sometimes God tests our faith to



sacrifice without requiring us to do so; that a complete belief in God's will and purpose together with a willingness to live a sacrificial life of service are at the centre of a life of faith. The story also teaches us that God, through Abraham, was demonstrating a sacrifice that God Himself would make in the gift of His only Son, Jesus Christ, whom He loved. In the first book of the Bible, then, through the testing of Abraham's faith, God foretold the time when His Son, in response to His Father's will and in love for us, would become the sacrifice for the sins of the world and, also, that He would rise again.

In having the faith to sacrifice, we continually witness the grace of God. God is the God of sacrifice and we are to be a people of sacrifice.

We should not overlook Isaac in this story.

His faith was remarkable. He never resisted the circumstances in which he found himself, but calmly submitted to them. He was a willing victim who, in figure, was raised out of a position of death to become a blessing to others (v.20). Isaac foreshadowed Christ who came to do His Father's will and submit Himself to the death of the cross. "Not My will but Yours be done" and "The cup that My Father has given Me shall I not drink it?" were His words as He approached the cross. But having gone through death, Jesus comes out in resurrection as the One who blesses and still blesses today.

Faith to bless

The faith to bless is mentioned both in regard to Isaac and to Jacob (vv.20,21). This is a wonderful aspect of the power of faith. It is one thing to be blessed and another to be a blessing. Jacob, as a young man, wanted to be blessed. He tricked his older brother out of his birthright and was encouraged by his mother to deceive Isaac into blessing him above



Esau. On the night he left his home in fear of Esau, he found himself alone at Bethel. God appeared to him that night in a wonderful dream in which he promised to be with Jacob and to bring him safely home.

It took twenty painful years in the house of Laban before Jacob made the return journey. Having sent his servants and family ahead of him, he found himself once more alone with God. That night, he wrestled with God, eventually pleading with God to bless him. God gave him a new name, Israel (meaning 'prince'), and blessed him. Jacob had the faith to ask God to bless him and, for the rest of his life, he became a blessing to others. He blessed Esau; he blessed Pharaoh, the greatest monarch in the world; he blessed his sons and his grandchildren. His life was transformed from selfishness to selflessness.

God wants to transform us into Christians who know His blessing and, as a result, are a blessing to others. Christians are made to receive and to give. God blesses us through faith and we need the faith to be a blessing to others. Think of the experiences you have had of God's goodness. Think about how you can pass on to others, in words, kindness, sympathy and care, the blessing of God.

Faith to worship

But Hebrews does not only record the fact that Jacob had the faith to bless others. It also tells us that he had the faith to worship (v.21). We are made not only to bless our fellow believers and our neighbours, but also to worship. Jesus explained to the woman at Sychar's well that the Father is seeking worshippers (John 4:23).

We might have thought of Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Moses as great worshippers. Of course they were. But God chooses to single out Jacob, the transformed man, the one who could speak of God as the "God who has been my Shepherd all my life to this day" (Genesis 48:15, NIV). Jacob, as a young man, so misunderstood the character of God yet, in later years, he had such a profound understanding of His grace. Every step Jacob took after Penuel was a reminder of the day he met God and God blessed him. He became the man who built altars to worship God and who ended his days as a worshipper. True men and women of faith are true worshippers. If we do not make time to worship God, we can never truly serve Him. Great workers start by being great worshippers.

Think of David – a psalmist before he met Goliath. Think of the early Christians who began the week remembering the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread. They came together to worship; then they went out to serve. That is God's order. When God arranged for His

people to come out of captivity in Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem, the first thing they did was surprising. They did not rebuild the walls to protect themselves. They started to rebuild the temple to worship God! So often we get the order wrong. We want to get out and do things for God. But God wants us first to come into His presence to worship Him. We need faith to worship.

Faith to hope

Joseph had faith to hope (v.22). Like the Lord Jesus, Joseph suffered at the hands of his brethren and was sold into slavery. But God was with him. God protected Joseph in Potiphar's house and in prison, blessing everything he did. Ultimately, Joseph came out of prison, not only to interpret Pharaoh's dream, but to transform his kingdom. By God's grace, Joseph developed the greatest nation on earth at that time. And, in saving the kingdom from famine, he was able to save his own family and see his father who loved him so dearly. There were so many things Joseph achieved which could have been recorded in Hebrews 11 to describe his faith! But we read only that he gave instruction concerning his bones (Genesis 50:25).

Why was this so important? It was important because it shows that Joseph looked to the future. Although he lived such an effective life in Egypt, his heart was in the Promised Land. He had faith to hope. He looked into the future when his people would leave Egypt and return to the land God gave them. He believed in the promises of God. And, sure enough, when Moses left Egypt on that Passover night, he took the remains of Joseph with him. It has been said that Joseph had the longest funeral in history. It lasted over forty years! As the children of Israel travelled through the wilderness, Joseph's remains went everywhere with them. Finally, Joshua took them into the Promised Land and the great man of God was buried at Shechem (Joshua 24:32).

Christianity is characterised by three things – faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love, which is eternal (1 Corinthians 13:13). Faith will give way to sight; hope will be fulfilled. But now, faith and hope are both active. We need to have the faith to hope. The Bible uses the word 'hope' in an entirely different way to its present day use. Hope today means something we would like to happen but there is no certainty that it will. Christian hope is something which is future but is absolutely certain!

Joseph believed with all certainty that God would lead His people to the Promised Land and he prepared for that event. We believe that one day Christ is coming again and, in the words of Paul, "we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Then, "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). This is a purifying hope: "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies Himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).

The Lord Jesus Himself has promised, "I will come again and receive you to Myself" (John 14:3). The Christian hope is absolutely certain. Do we live out our lives in the reality of that coming? Do we have the faith to hope? Is that hope in Him purifying our lives?

Studies in 2 Timothy

Chapter 4 - Paul's last words

Peter Ollerhead

There are few more touching scenes in Scripture than when the apostle Paul, nearing the end of his life, bids farewell to Timothy, his young friend and companion in faith. In these closing words to Timothy, it is still possible to feel Paul's deep love for Timothy and the urgency of his commission. This article is based on a talk given on London's Premier Christian Radio.

Preach the word (vv.1-5)

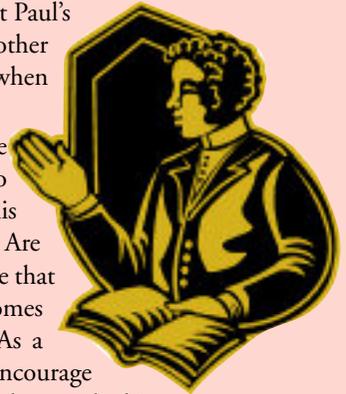
In the book "Last words of 500 remarkable people", reference is made to a man who is so remarkable that everyone I ask has never heard of him! Just before he died, he said, "I need no more medicine. I am well". If anyone needed a second opinion, it was that man!

As far as we are aware, 2 Timothy contains the last recorded words of the apostle Paul. They are of far greater import than the humorous quote above. The last words of some people are of great significance. I do not believe, however, that Paul's last words are necessarily of greater significance than his other writings. All his words are extremely important, regardless of when and where they were written.

Ch.3 ends with instructions regarding the Scriptures and the man of God. Ch.4 begins with Paul's solemn charge to Timothy to preach those same Scriptures. How significant this is for us today when so many will not listen to sound doctrine. Are we then to preach something in line with the fashion of the age that might appeal to the ears of the listeners? The answer, "No!" comes ringing down the years from the pen of the apostle Paul. As a minister of the word, Timothy was to correct, rebuke and encourage his fellow Christians. Scripture has the ability to do just this when applied in the power of the Holy Spirit (3:16,17).

This is probably the major theme of the pastoral epistles. Timothy was at Ephesus when Paul wrote to him, "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3). He was probably still there when he received this second letter. In the face of indifference and opposition, Timothy was to fulfil a four-fold request. He must not lose his self-control. Secondly, he must endure hardship. In our comfortable society today, the idea of suffering hardship is not very palatable. Often we are not very keen on engaging in Christian activity if it impinges on our comfort!

Thirdly, Timothy was to do the work of an evangelist. In the engineering workshop in which I worked in the 1950s, one of my fellow workers referred to another worker in a



sneering way as a “Come to Jesus” preacher. Personally, I believe that was a wonderful testimony to the man’s preaching for there is no better message. Paul certainly urged Timothy to do that kind of outreach preaching. He was to work in that hinterland between belief and unbelief, seeking to bring unbelievers into the glorious liberty of God’s rich forgiveness in Christ. Lastly, Timothy was to discharge all the duties of his ministry. He must not fall short on any aspect of his ministry to the Christians at Ephesus.

Ready to be offered (vv.6-8)

These words, written by a man about to be executed, are some of the most stirring words in Scripture: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” The note of triumph and victory in these words is truly amazing. The passage is worth examining more closely.

“For I am now ready to be offered.” So Paul similarly can write, “Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all” (Philippians 2:17). In this second quote, Paul uses the word ‘if’. There is doubt in his mind whether that imprisonment will end with his death. But, writing to Timothy, he has no doubt. Paul states quite definitely and defiantly that he is ready to be offered. The word ‘offered’ speaks of the drink offering (see Numbers 28) when wine would be poured on to the lamb of sacrifice. At Bethel, Jacob poured out a drink offering upon the pillar he had erected as a way for thanking God for His faithfulness in bringing him back to his father’s house (Genesis 35:14). This is how Paul viewed his imminent death.

“The time of my departure is at hand.” Here the thought is of a boat waiting to be cast off from its mooring. The cargo is loaded along with all the passengers, and all that remains is for the boat gently to leave the harbour for its destination across the sea. For Paul, death was but a journey from one shore to another. In his mind, the time for that journey had arrived. What a magnificent grasp of the reality of heaven this great Christian and honoured servant of Christ had!

“I have fought a good fight.” These words formed the inspiration for the well-known hymn, “Fight the good fight”. Ever since Paul’s conversion to Christ on the Damascus road many years before, he had endeavoured to battle for the truth as it is in Christ. “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” (Ephesians 6:12). Paul’s personal fight was nearing its end and, despite his desperate circumstances, he rested in the confidence of the victory of his Lord over death. Of Him he had written, “Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (1:10). Paul had already urged Timothy to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2:3). He wanted the battle to be continued in his absence.

“I have finished my course.” Here we have the figure of the stadium with the athlete approaching the winning post. ‘My course’ could refer to Paul’s earthly pilgrimage, but

might also refer to his ministry: “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). Paul was now aware that his ministry was finished.

“*I have kept the faith.*” In this last triumphant declaration, against all the opposition brought against him and the other apostles from the chief enemy of Christ and His Gospel, Paul had been faithful to the end. The words, however, mean much more than this. That holy, precious truth concerning Christ and His Church had been kept undefiled. Paul had carried through the task that was committed to him. It is worth noting, however, that Paul wanted Timothy to guard that same faith and to pass it on, in his turn, to others who would do the same (2:2).

In v.8, Paul moves on to the next stage of his life in Christ: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the *righteous* judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing”. Note the adjective which Paul uses to describe the Lord. He is ‘the righteous Judge’, in contrast to the unrighteous judge at Paul’s recent tribunal where he had been sentenced to death. In his confidence, Paul could look forward to the crown he would gain, the crown that is the reward for all who long for the glorious appearing of Christ.

Some final requests (vv.9-13)

Paul now moves on to some practical requests. Though he is aware that the end is near, he does not know when that hour will strike. He had already expressed his longing to see Timothy (1:4). There is a note of urgency in the entreaty here to Timothy to travel to see Paul as quickly as possible. There is also a note of sadness in the remarks he makes about his friend and fellow Christian, Demas, who had left Paul in prison. Demas had forsaken Paul because he loved this present world. He had neither the vision nor the grasp that Paul had for the world where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Demas had not set his heart on things above (Colossians 3:1). He was too concerned with the things of sight and sound. In our world that is so full of materialism, how easy it is to be like Demas and to love this present age to the detriment of our Christian testimony!

Two of Paul’s other companions had probably gone on missionary journeys. Whatever the reasons, Paul had waved goodbye to his two colleagues and turned to his good friend, Luke, who had stayed with him. It is quite probable that Luke did the actual writing out of the letter that bears Paul’s name. Paul often used a companion to act as secretary, finishing off the letter with a final greeting in his own script. Luke, being a doctor, would be especially valuable to the apostle, aged before his time with many journeys and hardships in his service for Christ. Luke obviously felt a great personal loyalty to Paul.

Paul also asks Timothy to bring Mark with him when he came. Mark was responsible for the quarrel between Paul and Barnabas that led to the break-up in their missionary partnership (Acts 15:37-40). Now Mark receives the commendation that he will be useful to the apostle. That quarrel had been settled earlier for we read that Mark had been with

Paul (Colossians 4:10). How good to see harmony restored between brothers in Christian service!

Paul asks Timothy to bring his cloak and the scrolls (v.13). At the end of his life, all this man possessed could be compressed into a shopping bag! To many modern eyes, Paul would be judged a failure. Success in our world is usually judged in terms of power, influence and wealth. Here is the man who influenced western civilisation perhaps more than any other individual, yet he died virtually penniless. Paul's many talents could have earned him a comfortable living in the Roman dominated world of the 1st century. Instead, he devoted himself to the cause of a crucified Galilean whom Paul believed was the Son of God Himself, eternally alive.

For and against (vv.14-18)

Alexander, a coppersmith or metalworker, is named as an enemy of Paul. This is possibly the same Alexander as mentioned earlier (1 Timothy 1:20) in conjunction with Hymenaeus with the comment that they had made shipwreck of their faith. Alexander's opposition is summed up: "he hath greatly withstood our words" or "strongly opposed our message" (NIV). If he was the companion of Hymenaeus, then he was teaching heresy (see 2:17,18).

The apostle now moves on to an account of his trial (vv.16-18). These words make clear that Paul was awaiting a second trial or hearing. It is possible that his first trial went better than he expected. It certainly gave him the opportunity to preach the Gospel at the centre of the Roman world. But he had to do it by himself! If a general and violent persecution was in progress, then that would be sufficient reason for his lonely situation. Onesiphorus had been commended earlier (1:16-18) for seeking out Paul, despite the fact that Paul was in prison. Standing with Paul before the Imperial Tribunal, however, required extraordinary courage and Paul would not blame anyone for not doing so; instead he prayed for their forgiveness.

Though Paul was conscious that he had been forsaken by men, he was very much aware that the Lord stood with him (v.17). He proved the Lord's promise given to His disciples, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). These same words must give us confidence, too, to face any situation in the will of God. He will be with us as He was with Paul.

It is possible to misread the Lord's promise and imagine that the leading of the Lord will always be away from trouble and danger into perfect safety. We see from Paul's experience that this is not so. Though Paul was delivered from the lion's mouth earlier (v.17), he is aware that he will soon be put to death (see also Hebrews 11:32-38). We, too, must not imagine that being a Christian will always lead to victory as the world understands victory. Standing for the truth of Christ often brings suffering. It did for Paul but, in it all, he had the presence of his Lord with him.

As Paul thinks of the ultimate victory, he cannot but break into a doxology. He rests in the confidence that the Lord will bring him safely to His heavenly kingdom and so exclaims, "To [Him] be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (v.18).

Personal greetings (vv.19-22)

The letter closes with some personal greetings to those whose friendship Paul valued. The first two mentioned are Priscilla and Aquila, who worked with Paul on several occasions as he moved round Europe. He first met them at Corinth and lodged with them there. They were close companions in the work of the Gospel. Onesiphorus has been mentioned already as one who sought out Paul on a visit to Rome. Trophimus is mentioned in Acts 20 as a travelling companion of Paul on his last journey to Jerusalem. Erastus may be the same person, the city treasurer of Corinth, mentioned in Romans 16. What is certain is that all of these names belong to that group of selfless individuals who, often at great personal cost, helped Paul to plant the Gospel across the Roman world.

V.21 reveals a touch that would have hurried Timothy on his way. Winter was approaching and Paul would be feeling the bone-biting chill of his prison cell. He needed both the warmth of his cloak and the encouragement of Timothy's personal presence. What an honour was Timothy's – to be part of the last request of this aged apostle. We do not know whether Timothy reached Rome before Paul was executed but it is recorded here that Paul, in the closing days of his life, wanted Timothy to be with him.

Part of the final benediction is for his young friend. Could there be a better prayer for Timothy than that the Lord Jesus Christ be with his spirit? Nothing more intimate or closer could be asked for. Paul's final prayer is for grace to be with all associated with Timothy. It is Paul's distinctive way of signing off, but no less precious, that the rich forgiving power of grace should be with them all. There is nothing greater or more powerful than the rich forgiving power of grace that was seen in the Lord Jesus. Whatever our situation, nothing will be more effective or desirable than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul first learned that on the Damascus road and he never ceased to be moved into praise whenever he thought about it.

This second letter to Timothy comes down the years to us today with all the freshness and power with which it left the hand of this great servant of the Lord. We leave him in his prison cell, a prisoner of the Emperor Nero. It seemed then, with Nero at the height of his power and Paul his prisoner, that Nero, rather than Paul, was the successful one, especially when his acolytes pronounced him divine. F.F.Bruce has pointed out that the day would come, however, when a man would call his dog Nero and his son Paul! Paul did not seek the judgment of history but rather the commendation of his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. May we all seek to follow the same Master today!



A Look at Nehemiah for Today

Part 3 Nehemiah – the inspector (2:11-20)

Ted Murray

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Paul had not yet penned these words, but Nehemiah already knew the truth of them. His actions are still an inspiration today.

His arrival in Jerusalem

We now find Nehemiah having a rest, but only for three days (v.11). But the man of action was not content to sit on his laurels as the visitor from the palace. No doubt, many of the notables in Jerusalem would want to catch up on the news of the court; many would want news of their relations who remained in Babylon. Others would just wish to pass the time of day with their notable visitor.

For his part, Nehemiah would ask pertinent questions about the state of affairs in the city. Why had the rebuilding work stopped? Are the daily sacrifices being continued? Are the gatekeepers still carrying out their duties? What about the priests and Levites? There would be all sorts of answers to these questions. Some would alarm him; some would placate his fears. Some would confirm what he had been told in Shushan, but all would make him keener to see the conditions for himself. God had given him a job to do. He had been granted permission to come to Jerusalem and he had the necessary paperwork to obtain building materials. He knew that he was in the place, and in the position, that God had for him. He had circumstantial evidence that what he was undertaking was in accord with God’s will. All this was the outcome of that brief prayer in 2:4.

As we think about these verses, we should be encouraged as we see how God not only answered Nehemiah’s prayer, but placed him in a position of authority with all the resources necessary to complete the task which God had laid upon his heart. In our day, too, when the Lord gives us a job to do, we can be assured that He will also give us the wherewithal to do it. The Lord is no man’s debtor!

Jerusalem by night

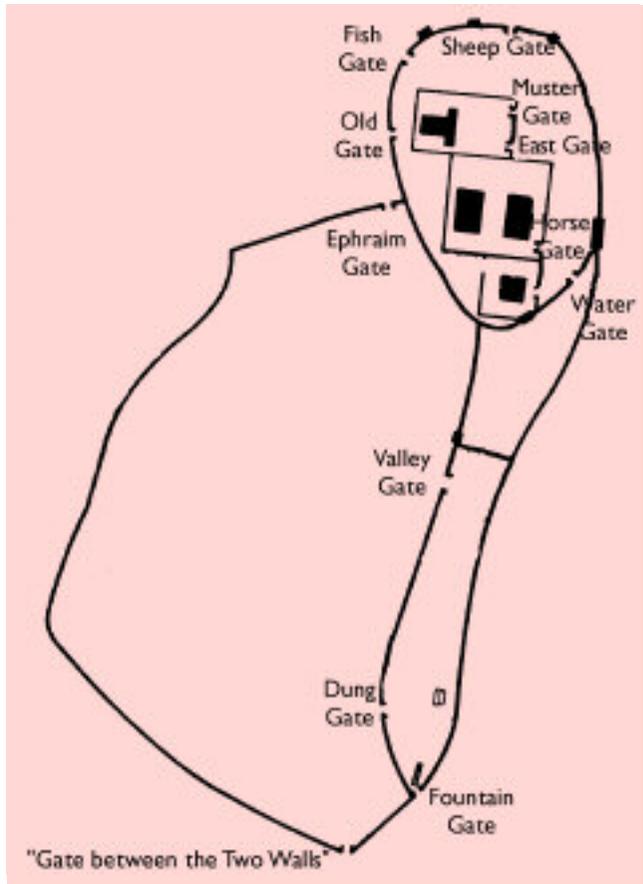
Having no doubt heard the various leaders, each giving differing views of the conditions of the city, Nehemiah could not contain the burden that was his any longer. By night, he decides to see the ruined conditions for himself. He did not share the burden that God had laid upon his heart with anyone else (v.16). He did not broadcast his intentions in order to seek assistance or to put anyone under duress to assist him in his fact-finding inspection of the walls and gates of Jerusalem. It was Nehemiah’s exercise, and his alone, that God had laid on his heart. We see in this action the example of a man who was circumspect in word and deed. Nehemiah did not boast or gossip about the task before him. He had already experienced the good hand of God upon him in the palace, and

on the journey. So he was confident that God would enable him to fulfil the task he had been given.

We are reminded of God's promise to Joshua: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). As we proceed through this book, we shall see how Nehemiah proves this verse for himself. In Nehemiah, we have yet another example of how to proceed when the Lord has laid a task on one's heart. By telling no one of his task, he did not have to hear the whys and wherefores from people who had other ideas e.g. is it the right time? are there sufficient funds to take on such an enormous task? One has written, "When the Lord distinctly gives a task to any one of His servants, nothing is frequently more dangerous than consultation with others". Once discussions are held about that which the Lord has so forcibly laid on His servant, then faith starts to take a back seat under the weight of prudence and so-called common sense. It is only when the time is right for the execution of the task, then and only then, does Nehemiah invite help from others.

Finding out the facts

It is difficult to discover the full extent of Nehemiah's fact-finding tour of the walls. He leaves the city by the Valley Gate, dropping down into the Tyropoeon Valley. From there, he was able to see the extent of the damage to the long length of wall that had once protected the western side of the city of David. He then makes his way to the Fountain Gate, passing by the Dung Gate, on the way to the southernmost point of the wall. He then turns northward, up the Kidron valley, to see the damage to the eastern side of the wall. Proceeding along this eastern side of the wall,



he would eventually come to the northernmost part of the wall. This part, which incorporated the Fish gate, also enclosed part of the Temple Mount. Nehemiah finally arrives back to his starting point, the Valley Gate.

In thinking about this tour by night, there are a number of issues on which to focus. The wall surrounding the City of David, the area of the city where the general citizens lived, would suggest his concern for the welfare of the people of God. That part of the wall surrounding the Temple Mount would suggest Nehemiah's concern for the worship of God. The Ophel, being the area where the priests and Levites dwelt, suggests concern for the servants of God. So Nehemiah's night time tour challenges us today about our concern for the following:

- ✿ The state of the general testimony
- ✿ The welfare of those with whom we are in fellowship
- ✿ The needs of God's servants
- ✿ How we come together for the Lord's Supper and for worship of the Father
- ✿ Is our worship in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Nehemiah's exercise concerning his beloved Jerusalem was personal and God-given. In our day, concern about the state of the breakdown must start with individual exercise before God, so that we are fully aware of the situation in which we find ourselves. What Nehemiah saw was exactly what he had heard (cf.v.13; 1:3). There had been neither embellishment nor understatement of the situation in the report given to him. How do we convey our local conditions to other interested believers? Are we totally honest with the truth, or do we put a slight gloss on things? We, too, need to tell of conditions as they really are. Otherwise visitors, or other believers who move into the district, will find that our local conditions differ from what they had been led to believe.

The inspector's report

What a scene is now before us! We can try to imagine the assembled company. The leaders of Jerusalem, the priestly hierarchy and the ordinary citizens gathered together in Nehemiah's lodgings. He does not berate the assembled company for their failure to repair the walls but identifies himself with their distress: "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach" (v.17). Nehemiah makes them fully aware that he has firsthand experience of the conditions of the walls and gates.

He does not, however, wring his hands asking what can be done! He takes the opportunity to tell them how he had been blessed by God. He had personal experience of the good hand of God upon him (v.18). He knew of God's overriding, providential care during his long journey to Jerusalem. He could relate how the king had given him leave from his duties at the palace, together with permission to source the materials he needed to repair the breakdown and also to provide for his own domestic situation. Materially, Nehemiah appears to be well provided for, but he does not emphasise this

point. He rather testifies that “the hand of my God” was in it all. What a wonderful way in which to encourage a distressed, downcast company of people! We, today, should also not be ashamed of telling what the Lord has done for us. We should recount humbly, without boasting, how God has worked in our lives. In this way, we, too, can encourage, cheer and motivate the disheartened amongst us.

Having given his report, and testified of his experience of God’s hand upon him, Nehemiah invites the people to join him in his task of rebuilding the walls: “Come and let us build” (v.17). Nehemiah must have been encouraged by the resolute response of this believing, cheered company: “Let us rise up and build” (v.18). This was not idle talk, for we read, “They set their hands to do this good work” (v.18). God always has ready hands to do what is according to His will.

Opposition to the work

Whenever there is a work of God in progress, Satan will oppose it. We see this as we read again of Sanballat and Tobiah. This time they have another companion, Geshem the Arab. The former two had been deeply disturbed when Nehemiah first came to Jerusalem (v.10). Now we read that they laugh and pour scorn on Nehemiah’s decision to rebuild the walls and gates. We live in a day where we, too, may be laughed at for our beliefs because they are based on Scripture. Geshem, a descendant of Ishmael or Esau, typifies what is of the flesh. We see around us in Christendom the effects of this tendency: acts of adultery, divorce and homosexuality are not only being condoned but are now being accepted as a way of life. This manner of life is an abomination to God and contrary to His word.

The walls are indeed in ruins! They are completely broken down and the enemy has free access within, pouring scorn on those who are walking faithfully before God, in accordance with His word. What a lesson we can learn from Nehemiah’s response to their mockery and their accusation of being rebellious to the king! Nehemiah confesses to them his unwavering faith in God. “The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem” (v.20).

The boldness and confidence of Nehemiah shine out like a ray of sunlight on a gloomy day. The combination of his experience of, and his faith in, God are evident in this reply. Today, we all have had some experience of the way in which the Lord has helped us in the past. Like Nehemiah, we should trust Him for the future. Our stand for Christ should be similarly bold and confident in this day of mockery and scorn. James reminds us, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). So Paul can exclaim to the Romans, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). With the added assurance of these scriptures, let us be bold and confident, rather than apologetic, in the face of those who are bringing evil into the Church. We need to rebuild the walls of separation from such evil. Evil practitioners have “no heritage or right or memorial” in the Church of the living God.

The Writings of Jeremiah

Donald Hill

When did you last read 'The Book of Jeremiah' or his 'The Book of Lamentations'? This article is a timely reminder that these often neglected books still speak to us today.

Introduction

Jeremiah makes a major contribution to the contents of the Old Testament. Since all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable..." (2 Timothy 3:16), his writings must be profitable. Despite this, the book of Jeremiah and the book of Lamentations are seldom considered in public Bible studies. "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which has been brought on me, which the LORD has inflicted on me in the day of his fierce anger" (Lamentations 1:12) may be familiar, but how much else of that book is known? In this article, we will consider what Jeremiah has to say, particularly in the book of Lamentations, and its relevance to the present day.

Life and times of Jeremiah

Jeremiah the prophet was of the priestly line. He came from Anathoth, which was part of the territory of Benjamin and had been given to the Levites. His ministry extends from the latter part of Josiah's reign, through the reign of Zedekiah, and on to the time of the captivity of Nebuchadnezzar, when many from Judah were taken to Babylon. He would witness the destruction of Solomon's Temple, together with the city walls of Jerusalem. The Temple worship had ceased. These were dark days in the history of the nation of the Jews. The ten northern tribes had already been taken into captivity by the Assyrians. Now Nebuchadnezzar was allowed by God to punish Judah. We need to examine the reasons why God allowed this to happen.

1. Spiritual declension and departure from God began towards the end of Solomon's reign. "But king Solomon loved many strange women...his wives turned away his heart after other gods...Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites" (1 Kings 11:1-5).
2. Solomon's sin resulted in the division of the kingdom following his death. Jeroboam became king of the ten northern tribes (Israel), whilst Rehoboam became king of the two southern tribes with Jerusalem as the centre (Judah).
3. There followed a succession of kings in both Israel and Judah. Some were faithful to God and sought to bring about recovery. Others failed miserably and led the people in idolatry. The history of these kings is in 2 Chronicles.
4. The leaders of each nation, including kings, prophets and priests, failed.
5. Each nation as a whole failed inasmuch that they turned their backs upon God and committed spiritual adultery. The Sinai covenant was broken.

Light on the horizon indicated that Judah's captivity in Babylon would last for 70 years (2 Chronicles 36:21-23). In the ways of God, the twelve tribes of Israel will finally be established as a nation in the land when they recognise and own their true Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although Jeremiah was witness to the general decline which took place in Judah, he personally remained faithful to his God. He boldly condemned the shortcomings of the nation. Known as the weeping prophet, he was not ashamed to shed tears because of the state of the nation. In this respect, he was like the Lord Jesus who, some 600 years later, wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

Through Jeremiah, God describes the sin of the nation very pointedly: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). They had turned to idols and, as a consequence, the land, which had been a good land, was defiled (v.7).

Yet, despite their sin, God still pleaded with His people: "Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead" (v.9). Showers were withheld, as also the latter rain, both vital for growing crops (Jeremiah 3:3). "Turn, O backsliding children" was yet another appeal (v.14). All this was to no avail. King Nebuchadnezzar was, therefore, raised up to execute judgment upon Judah.

The book of Lamentations

The book of Lamentations, as the title suggests, is a lament over the conditions which prevailed following the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar with its consequent destruction. Poetic in content, each chapter has 22 verses (corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet), except ch.3 which has 22 triplets of verses, 66 in all.

Chapter 1. The once great Jerusalem, with its temple, priests and temple worship, is now desolate. This is a consequence of the sin of the people. V.12 is often quoted in relation to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus at Calvary, and rightly so (see Matthew 27:39,40). However, the language is that of Judah, following the destructive work of the Babylonians. V.18 would indicate some acknowledgement of the righteousness of God in action.

Chapter 2. This chapter describes the miseries which are connected with the sin of the nation. The destructive work is allowed by God, who previously had fought *for* Israel against her enemies. Although the destruction was carried out by Nebuchadnezzar and his invading army, the language of the chapter ascribes the judgment to the Lord. "The LORD hath swallowed up..." (v.2); "He hath bent his bow like an enemy" (v.4); "The LORD was an enemy" (v.5); "The LORD hath cast off his altar" (v.7).

Solemn feasts and Sabbaths are at an end. Food is in short supply and many dead bodies lie amidst the ruins. "Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?" (v.15) is the question raised by the enemy.

Chapter 3. In this chapter, the language takes on the singular form: "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath" (v.1). Here Jeremiah expresses his personal



feelings. Notice the frequent use of the words, ‘He hath’ in the first section. It is all about what God had done.

However, in the later section (vv.22-32), Jeremiah records the faithfulness of God: “His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness” (vv.22,23). Although men and women and nations change, God Himself remains steadfast and true to His word. Amidst the prevailing gloom, Jeremiah expresses his confidence in God. Noteworthy statements are:

1. “The LORD is my portion...therefore will I hope in him” (v.24). Can we say this today?
2. “The LORD is good unto those who wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him” (v.25). We today are waiting for God’s Son from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10).
3. “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD” (v.26).
4. “But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (vv.32,33). God is a God of compassion and if the nation is under discipline, He will take them up again for blessing.

Jeremiah goes on to appeal to the nation to search their hearts, to acknowledge their sin, and to return to the Lord (vv.40-42). He expresses his deep sorrow because of the plight of the people: “Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people” (v.48). There follows one of the many “Fear not’s of Scripture (v.57).

Chapter 4. “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed” (v.1). This would suggest that the precious things of God had been profaned; they are likened to tarnished gold. The severity of God’s judgment is said to be greater than the destruction of Sodom in a former day (v.6). Both prophets and priests are held responsible (v.13).

Chapter 5. The chapter opens with the words, “Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us; consider and behold our reproach” (v.1). More details are given of the oppression of the people in all stations of life – princes, men, women, children – all are included. The chapter closes with the thought of the God who never changes and with a prayer: “Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (v.21).

Lessons for today

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning” (Romans 15:4). What are the lessons we should learn from the writings of Jeremiah?

1. The nation of Israel reached the pinnacle of her relationship with God in the days of Solomon, following the dedication of the temple. Departure and declension set in, however, as Solomon’s reign drew to a close and only accelerated under the many kings who followed. God therefore, because of His relationship with the people, acted in judgment. The ten northern tribes were scattered amongst the nations. The two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were enslaved by the Babylonians but, in the ways of God, there were those who returned in the days of Ezra, Nehemiah and Zerubbabel to begin a rebuilding programme. God had in mind, even then, those who would be there in the land when the advent of His Son took place. God never deviates from His purposes! Today, in spite of all the ruin, God is looking for true-hearted men and women who will respond to Him and His beloved Son in worship, praise, adoration and loyal service. Daniel and Jeremiah are two who remained faithful in their day.
2. The truth and light of the Gospel of the grace of God began in Jerusalem, as the Lord had requested, and spread throughout the Roman Empire primarily through the devotion of the apostle Paul and his co-workers. Eventually, it reached these shores and those of other western European nations. Additionally, because Europeans settled in North America, Australia, New Zealand and other countries, they took with them the light of the Gospel. The invention of the printing press, the stand taken by Martin Luther and the zeal of believers at the time enabled the Scriptures and the truth of God to be printed and made available to all. The light of the Gospel shone brightly in the western world. Evangelists from America visited these shores and many souls were saved and added to the Church. Now however, like Israel of old, this nation has turned its back on God and is serving many idols. Remember, an idol is something in life which takes the place of God. So John solemnly warns us, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). We are all in danger of falling into the trap – the family, our work, our hobbies – all can be an excuse for missing out on the prior

claim, that of owning the Lordship of Christ. Nationally, we are beset by problems; many are the result of the nation turning its back on God.

3. As believers, are we indifferent to the attitude of men and women towards God in our day? This was certainly not true of Jeremiah who expressed his deep concern before God with tears. The Lord Jesus was also deeply concerned about the unwillingness of the nation of Israel in His day: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered [you]...and you would not" (Matthew 23:37). In that same concern, He wept over that city. We are exhorted to pray for all men, everywhere; we have a God who would have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:1-4).
4. God Himself is "the fountain of living waters" (2:13). Israel as a nation were taken up with broken cisterns which could never give true satisfaction. To the woman at Sychar's well, the Lord Jesus said, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13,14). As believers, are we looking for refreshment at this world's broken cisterns, or are we drinking of the living waters and tasting those joys which never fade? Those joys are to be found only in our Lord Jesus Christ.
5. Amidst all the gloom and darkness of his day, Jeremiah had an unshaken confidence in his God: "The LORD is my portion...therefore will I hope in him" (3:24). All around us, we see failure and breakdown. Brethren disappoint you; family and friends fail you. But like Jeremiah, we can each one say with confidence, "The Lord is my portion".

"He'll go with me all the way; He's my comfort and my stay.

From His tender loving mercy, I will never, never stray.

O'er the mountains rough and steep, through the valley dark and deep,

Till I reach my home in glory, He'll go with me all the way!"



May we be both
encouraged and
challenged by
this
consideration of
Jeremiah and
the events
surrounding him
in his day.

The Gospel in Job

Part 6

Yannick Ford

“Keep watch over the door of my lips” was David’s prayer (Psalm 141:3). The unhelpful comments of Job’s supposed friends are a powerful reminder that we need to make that prayer our own. Job’s searchings for God make us realise how richly we have been blessed in the full revelation He has given us in His Son.

Zophar’s second speech (ch.20)

Job had said earlier, “And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself” (19:4). He was challenging his friends by saying that, despite all their suggestions that Job’s wickedness had brought on him all this trouble, they still could not state what it was that he had done.

In ch.20, Zophar graphically describes the woes of the wicked and, in doing so, implies that Job is guilty of greed and oppression. His vivid descriptions need little comment! Zophar prefaces his comments by saying, “Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for this I make haste. I have heard the check of my reproach, and the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer” (vv.2,3). He certainly gives the impression that his tirade is the result of hasty speech, without too much forethought.

Job’s reply (ch.21)

In ch.21, Job replies to contradict Zophar’s analysis. Thus, in vv.7-12, he says that the wicked, rather than suffering, often appear to lead settled and prosperous lives. There have been many instances in history, and even today, when wicked men and women have *apparently* not been brought to justice, but rather have enjoyed the fruits of their wickedness. I say *apparently* for it is after death that accounts are settled. V.13 is therefore apt: “They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave”. So we read, “It is appointed unto men once to die, *but after this the judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27). In this context, the example of the rich man and Lazarus is very relevant (Luke 16:19-31; see part 2 of this series).

Job goes on to say that because these wicked people have all that they desire in this life, they naturally do not want to know God or think about His ways: “Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?” (vv.14,15). There are many like this today. Not only are they ignorant of their responsibility towards God, and His thoughts about them, they *do not want to know!* They would much rather not be bothered about such things. They do not see any benefit in serving God; on the contrary, their lifestyle seems to suit them very well.

However, as Job points out, “Their prosperity is not in their hand” (v.16,

JND trans.). God will bring them into judgment – they are not the ultimate masters of their own lives and prosperity. But, as far as man can see, this judgment of God may not always be apparent (vv.23-26). So the psalmist Asaph was distressed as he saw the prosperity of the wicked and their apparent end. He had to learn to see things as God sees them: “*Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end*” (Psalm 73:17).

Job concludes his reply to Zophar by saying in effect, “I know what you are thinking – you are saying, ‘Where is the good man, and where is the wicked?’ – but ask those around you: the wicked are reserved for the day of calamity” (see vv.27-30). Thus the ‘comforts’ of Job’s friends were indeed in vain (v.34).

In these two chapters, we see a good example of hasty speech from Zophar, which did nothing to comfort or help Job, and a very perceptive rebuttal by Job. We do not hear Zophar again – perhaps he felt that there was nothing more to be said or, perhaps the fact that Job so clearly refuted his arguments, left him unwilling to try again. Before leaving these two chapters and moving into the third cycle of arguments, it is worth weighing the truth of Job’s words: “Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb. The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him, *and every man shall draw after him, as there are innumerable before him*” (21:32,33). An innumerable quantity of people has already passed into death, and every man and woman follows them. Yet how many



have given proper consideration to what lies beyond?

Eliphaz's third speech (ch.22)

Eliphaz now starts off the third cycle of arguments. In the opening verses, he effectively says, "God does not owe you anything, even if you are righteous" (vv.1-4). He thus counters Job's claim that he was righteous by saying that, even if this were so, this would not make God Job's debtor. He then continues by actually charging Job with specific sins.

In one sense, Eliphaz was right – God does not owe us anything; if we live in the way God requires of us, then we are simply fulfilling our duty. So the Lord Jesus, speaking to His disciples about service, has to say, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:7-10). That is our side of the matter, so to speak. If we are tempted to think what wonderful service we have been giving to the Lord, we need to remind ourselves that we are only doing what we ought to be doing anyway, with probably a lot left undone!

We do not get a letter of congratulations from the police each time we keep to the speed limit when driving – we are expected to do so! However, God does not act in this way. Although He owes us nothing, He nevertheless delights to reward us when we please Him, even though, in the first place, He has given us the ability to do so. So right at the end of the Bible, the Lord Jesus promises, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is

with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). He is looking forward to rewarding those who belong to Him.

God takes note of the times when we serve Him. He spoke highly of Job when He confronted Satan: "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (1:8). Notice especially the words, 'My servant Job'. God had affection for Job, and took delight in him.

Eliphaz then forcibly accuses Job of many sins, in a completely unjustifiable manner. He claims that Job's sins are innumerable (v.5), that he has been exacting towards the poor by taking their very clothes as surety, and that he has not helped the thirsty and starving (vv.6,7), but has favoured the wealthy instead of the widows and fatherless (vv.8,9). "Not surprisingly", Eliphaz says in effect, "You are now in all this trouble, Job" (see vv.10,11). He then accuses Job of suggesting that God does not know, or does not concern Himself, with what is going on. "You say, 'How does God know?' " (v.13). Eliphaz then goes on, "But the wicked men who were before the flood said the same, but this did not help them!" (vv.15-17).

Eliphaz's logical conclusion is that Job should reconcile himself to God: "Reconcile thyself now with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee" (v.21, JND trans.). "If you do this", Eliphaz is saying, "you will be in

prosperity again” (vv.22-30). That we should be reconciled to God is good advice. But God is holy, and our sins and wrongdoings mean that we cannot stand before Him with a totally clear conscience. How then can we be reconciled? The answer is clearly provided in the New Testament: “For if, when we were enemies, *we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Romans 5:10). As in all things, it is God who has taken the initiative. We can be fully reconciled to Him because His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, died for our sins.

Job’s reply (ch.23,24)

In ch.23, Job takes up Eliphaz’s comments, and replies in effect, “Yes, I would willingly be reconciled to God, but where do I find Him? How do I get an audience with Him?” (vv.1-3). Many people have asked questions like these, with more or less sincerity. They have some conception that there is a God to whom, one day, they will need to give an account for their lives. But where is He? How does one interact with Him? Once again, God has taken the initiative here – He has come to us! When the Lord Jesus came to this earth as a baby, it was said, “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, *and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us*” (Matthew 1:23).

‘Emmanuel’ was one of the names given to the Lord Jesus, who came to make God known to us. All that we need to know, or indeed can know, about God has been fully made known to us in the

Person of the Lord Jesus. On one occasion, His disciple Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us”. The Lord Jesus had to reply, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” (John 14:8,9). Moreover, Jesus wanted men and women to come to Him, to find Him, so that they could be reconciled to God: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). None who come to Him will be rejected: “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Sadly, however, He had to say of some, “*Ye will not come to me*, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). In the Person of the Lord Jesus, God has come very close to each one of us; He wants us to come to Him, but He will not force us to do so. There are some who will still reject His love. They will have to suffer the awful consequences of their own choice.

Job continues his speech in vv.4-7. “If I could find Him”, he is saying, “then I could meet with God, reason with Him, and justify myself. He would understand my case”. Job had to learn that, while he was not guilty of the particular sins that Eliphaz had charged him with, yet he could not possibly stand before God in his *own* merits. Job did not appreciate God’s holiness or his own sinfulness. That is a very common mistake! We are all prone to compare ourselves with others, generally with those whom we think are much worse than ourselves! So we feel that we are pretty good, honest

people! But the standard of God's holiness is very high. Who of us could honestly say that we have always attained the standard outlined by the Lord Jesus in the 'sermon on the mount'? (see Matthew chs.5-7).

The prophet, Isaiah, writes of a vision that he had, when he was brought into the presence of God. Doubtless, Isaiah was a godly man; we do not hear anything in the Bible that tells us of his failings or sins. Nevertheless, he did not feel at ease in God's presence. In the presence of the thrice holy God, Isaiah felt keenly his unfitness to be there. "Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips," was his own confession (Isaiah 6:1-7). Although we have no particular reason to believe that Isaiah was a very sinful man, he immediately felt the 'uncleanness' of his lips. This is not too surprising – we all, no doubt, often offend in what we say.

How difficult it is never to speak badly of others, behind their backs, never to gossip, never to say unkind things when we are provoked, etc. Changing the metaphor from lips to tongue, James tells us, "For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind. But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God" (James 3:7-9). How true, therefore, that "if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (James 3:2).

What should Job do, then, and what should we do, if to stand in the presence

of God so clearly demonstrates our unfitness in His sight, because of His holiness? We can turn to Isaiah again for the answer, as he records God's comments on the matter: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (1:18). God *does* want us to meet with Him; He wants us to admit our sinfulness, for then He is able to justify us. Even though our sins may stand out like scarlet or crimson stains, they can be blotted out completely!

Job, however, had not yet understood these things. He still protests his innocence and integrity (vv.10-12) and accuses God of acting arbitrarily: "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (v.13). God can indeed do anything, but He does not do things arbitrarily – He will always remain true to His character of holiness and love.

Nevertheless, Job was not guilty of the sins of which Eliphaz had accused him in 22:5-9. In ch.24, Job contradicts Eliphaz to point out that those guilty of crimes and oppression often do appear to succeed in this life – but not ultimately (19-20, 23-24). Once again, then, Eliphaz did not succeed in helping Job, but rather we see Job and his friends becoming more and more entrenched in their positions. In the next chapter, we have the final comment from Job's friends, viz. the third speech of Bildad, and Job's response, after which Job's friends run out of arguments!

Lessons From the Life of Noah

John Keable

Many people carry a picture from childhood of Noah as a quaint figure in a toy set with a wooden ark and animals. This brief, but telling, look at the life of Noah challenges us by the reality of his life.

The world of Noah

Noah was a man who lived a godly life in a godless world. He came from a good family. His great grandfather was Enoch who “walked with God...God...took him” (Genesis 5:24). His grandfather was Methuselah, who lived longer than any other person recorded in Scripture (v.27). His father was Lamech, who seems to have been a prophet for, when Noah was born, Lamech said he would be a comfort in a time of turmoil (v.29). In fact, the name ‘Noah’ means ‘comfort’ or ‘rest’.

Noah lived in a day when God had been all but forgotten. The world was full of evil, violence and immorality (Genesis 6:5). So evil was the world that God decided enough was enough. How much worse does today’s world need to get in order to be as bad as the world of Noah’s day? Despite this, there is an amazing ‘but’ in v.8: “But



Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD”. With all that was going on around him, Noah stood out as one who was different. God found him “righteous in this generation” (7:1).

Righteous in his generation

We know nothing about the first 500 years of his life, but we must assume that his life was devoted to God. He was determined to live righteously, regardless of the situation around him. What a lesson this is for us today! We live in a time when God’s word is neglected and even opposed. Many recent laws in our land are in direct opposition to the instructions given by God in the Bible. How do we react to this? Do we simply ignore it and get on as best we can? Or do we stand up for what is right and warn those around of the destruction to which they are heading? In a world which is rapidly spiralling out of control, will we simply be like the crowd or will we, like Noah, find favour in the eyes of the Lord?

Noah was saved because God saw him as “righteous in this generation”. We can be righteous before God if we trust in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. Having done that, God expects to see a difference in the way we live – He expects us to live righteously.

Ready to obey

Noah obeyed the word of God without question: “Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22). As a result, he was saved when the world of his day was destroyed. Not only was he saved, but all the members of his family and the animals that came to him were saved also. What impact do we have on those around us? When we tell others of the only way of salvation, does the way we live bear out what we say?

Ready to worship

When the flood came in judgment upon the world, Noah was not forgotten: “But God remembered Noah...” (8:1). God is a faithful God; those who are faithful to Him will be remembered and will be kept through whatever trials come their way. As a result, Noah became a worshipper of God. “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD...he sacrificed burnt offerings on it” (Genesis 8:20). This is the first mention in Scripture of an altar being built for worship. Noah understood that salvation comes at a price; he sacrificed clean animals as a “thank You” for his salvation. When Jesus died on the cross, His sacrifice paid the price of our salvation. As those brought into blessing, it is right and proper that we also take time out to worship Him for what He has done for us.

Blessing followed Noah’s obedience and worship: “Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth”” (Genesis 9:1). The blessing Noah received was a blessing for the future world. God gave a sign of His promise of blessing, a sign which can still be seen today – His

rainbow. So God said to Noah, “I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth... I will remember” (9:13-16). When God makes a promise, it is a promise that will stand forever!

Less than perfect

Everybody gets it wrong sometimes; Noah was no exception (Genesis 9:20,21). Some biographers may have preferred to leave out any mention of failure. Others would probably dwell on it or use it to undermine all the good things Noah did. God does neither. He gives an honest account of Noah’s mistake, mentions how it was dealt with, and nothing more is said about it. We could all learn a valuable lesson from that!

Being dead, he still speaks

Noah died when he was 950 years old (Genesis 9:29). But his story does not end there! The Lord Jesus mentioned Noah and compared the days in which he lived to the days immediately prior to His return: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:37-39).

The writer to the Hebrews used Noah as one of his ‘heroes of faith’ in ch.11: “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (v.7).

Finally, Peter uses Noah as an example of the patience of God: “...when God waited patiently in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:20) and as a proof of the judgment to come: “If [God] did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah...then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:5-9).

The challenge today

Noah lived thousands of years ago yet, in many ways, his world was very similar to ours. We may be more advanced in science and technology, but our hearts are the same: “every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood” (Genesis 8:21). In this 21st century, Noah challenges us to hear and respond to the word of God in a day and amongst a people who have forgotten, rejected or abandoned God altogether. Will you take up that challenge?

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Jesus Lives!

“Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19)

Jesus lives! thy terrors now
can, O death, no more appal us;
Jesus lives! By this we know,
thou, O grave, canst not enthral us.
Hallelujah!

Jesus lives! for us He died;
then, alone to Jesus living,
pure in heart may we abide,
glory to our Saviour giving.
Hallelujah!

Jesus lives! our hearts know well,
naught from us His love shall sever;
life, nor death, nor powers of hell,
tear us from His keeping ever.
Hallelujah!

Jesus lives! to Him the throne
o'er all the world is given.
we shall go where He is gone,
rest and reign with Him in heaven.
Hallelujah!

C.F.Gellert

*“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come unto
God by Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them”
(Hebrews 7:25)*