

# Scripture Truth

April - June 2008

Daily Cleansing  
Nehemiah's Prayers  
"The Lord loveth Him"  
Letter to a Nobleman  
The cups of the Passover  
Hebrews and the Heavenly Calling

# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

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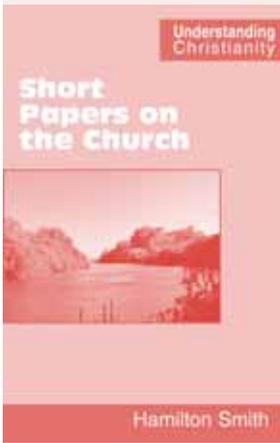
Annual Subscription 2008

£9.50 Post Free UK – £11.50 Post Free Overseas

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**SCRIPTURE TRUTH** is the imprint of the Central Bible Hammond Trust

Registered Charity No. 223327

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# The cups of Passover

John Weston

*“The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed.” In this spirit the writer illuminates the “cup of blessing which we bless” from the Old-Testament references in the cups of Passover.*

*“This cup is the new covenant in my blood”*... How precious these words are to each believer, as Sunday by Sunday we gather around the Lord’s table! Contemplating the emblems on the table before us, we bow in worship and thanksgiving for the mighty sacrifice at Calvary. John, the beloved disciple who was in the upper room and heard these words spoken by his Master, could by divine authority say in later years, “The blood of Jesus the Messiah... cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). “*This cup*”, Jesus had said – “THIS cup.” There are five ritual cups of wine drunk during the Passover meal. Any one of them the Lord could have selected, and said, “*this cup*.” But no – it was the third cup of the evening that the Lord chose, and to which He gave that special meaning that occupies our attention when partaking of the Lord’s supper.

*“This cup”,  
Jesus had said  
– “THIS cup.”*

In this article I want to examine the five cups, and their meaning and significance.

At the commencement of the meal, the first cup drunk is the Kiddush, the cup of sanctification. Later, a second cup is taken; this is the cup of salvation, and we have reference to this cup in Luke 22:17. Then, after supper, the third cup is taken. This is the cup of blessing, the one which the Lord took and to which

He gave the special meaning (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:16). At the end of the Passover meal, the cup of thanksgiving is drunk. The fifth cup is filled, but has never yet been drunk. This is Elijah’s cup. In fact, at this point in the meal, a young person is sent to the door to make sure that Elijah is not standing outside. The Jews know from their Bible, the Tenach, that Elijah will come before the Messiah (Malachi 4:5-6), and they also believe that his arrival will coincide with Passover. (The Tenach is what we call the Old Testament. In Hebrew it consists of the three letters, T, N, and CH. “T” stands for *Torah* or the Pentateuch, “N” for *neviim*, that is, the prophets, and “Ch” for *chotvim*, or “the writings”).

The Jewish rabbis see a link between these five cups and the five promises outlined in Exodus 6:6-8:

- “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”
- “I will rid you out of their bondage.”
- “I will redeem you.”
- “I will take you to me for a people.”
- “I will bring you in unto the Land.”

Each one of these promises is complete in itself, but yet at the same time they are progressive until the glorious climax is reached.

These five promises have a spiritual application for the believer, and we too can link them to the five cups. We have before us:–

- A cup of bringing forth, or sanctification.
- A cup of salvation.
- A cup of blessing.
- A cup of thanksgiving.
- A cup of a glorious heritage.

As we consider the promises alongside the cups, we must always have in mind the Passover (Exodus 12). It provides the backcloth to our thinking. Firstly, the deliverance and exodus from Egypt, the death of the lamb and the sprinkling of its blood upon the doorpost. Secondly, the promise of God that, when He saw the blood, He would “Passover” those sheltering beneath the blood.

We recall that the lamb was under close scrutiny for those crucial days from the tenth to the fourteenth of that first month (Exodus 12:2-6). If declared perfect, it was then put to death.

And the Holy Lamb of God presented Himself to Jerusalem also on the tenth day of the first month. He was under observation during that final week, and on the fourteenth day the religious leaders could find no fault, but had to resort to hiring false witnesses. Pilate, representing the political leaders, declared, not once but three times, that he found no fault with Him. Then, as Lamb of God, He was nailed to the cross... His precious blood was shed. Through His death and resurrection, the promise of God became a reality, and the door of life was opened to all those who accepted God’s gift of forgiveness and salvation.

This is the context of our thinking about the meaning for the Christian of the promises of Exodus 6:6-8 listed above.

Promise no. 1

“I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

John Bunyan recounts in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, “I saw in my dream... that he [Christian] ran thus until he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a Cross... that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed off his shoulders... and began to tumble... and I saw it no more.”

Yes, burdens are lifted at Calvary! The Christian experience, of losing the burden and of forgiveness, all begins at the Cross. We drink, as it were, the cup of sanctification. John Newton's life as a slave trader was transformed by his vision of the Cross.

He explains:–

“In evil long I took delight  
Unawed by shame or fear,  
Till a new object struck my sight  
And stopped my wild career.

I saw One hanging on a tree, in agonies and blood!”

What a first promise this is – but there is more!



**Promise no. 2**

“I will rid you out of their bondage.”

Thunders Paul, “Sin shall not have dominion over you” – and again, “We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 6:14; 8:37).

This second promise is reflected in the second cup, the cup of salvation. Salvation is both comprehensive and complete. Regrettably, so many believers fail to live in the good of it. They travel 3<sup>rd</sup> class with a 1<sup>st</sup> class ticket, or, as J. B. Phillips said of them, “[Their] God is too small.”

However, we have to face reality. We still have the old nature which takes every opportunity to assert itself. There are times when we identify ourselves with Paul, “For that which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that I do not: but what I hate, that I do” (Romans 7:15).

How necessary, then, it is for us to come daily in repentance! With the Psalmist, we too can drink “the cup of salvation” (Psalm 116:13). This psalm is one of the hallel psalms, and is sung during the Passover meal.

**Promise no. 3**

“I will redeem you.”

Yes, this speaks peace to our hearts. We *are* redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. This is the grand message of the third cup – the cup of blessing. *This* cup, the Lord emphasised, is the new covenant in His blood.

The writer to the Hebrews expresses it so beautifully. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh...let us draw near” (10:19-22).

We indeed do “draw near” in worship, in adoration and praise. J.G.Deck’s hymn says,

“His precious blood avails us there  
As we approach the throne;  
And His own wounds in heaven declare  
The atoning work is done.

Within the holiest of all,  
Cleansed by His precious blood,  
Before the throne we prostrate fall,  
And worship Thee, O God.”

*We are redeemed by the  
precious blood of Jesus.  
This is the grand message  
of the cup of blessing.*

**Promise no. 4**

“I will take you to me for a people.”

This is amazing grace!

Little wonder that this promise is linked to the fourth cup, the cup of thanksgiving. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul reminds us, “But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” – and again, “Now

therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:13, 19). Peter declares, “But ye...which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Our dear Helena von Poseck gives us the words to sing,

“Father, this mystery of love  
Must all our praise excel:  
No human, no angelic tongue  
Its wondrous depths can tell;  
For what were we that Thou on us  
Such love shouldst ever pour?  
We bow, and, filled with joy and awe,  
Father and Son adore.”

Let us take the cup of Thanksgiving, and be glad!

**Promise no. 5**

“I will bring you in unto the Land.”

The Passover meal ends with joyful anticipation. Elijah’s cup *will* be drunk, and that soon. This will herald the coming of the long-expected Messiah.

Down through the generations, the last phrase to be spoken at the Passover meal is, “Next year in Jerusalem.” In Israel to-day this phrase often ends with “the Rebuilt.”

This yearning is encapsulated in the *Hatikvah*, the Israeli national anthem:

“So long as still within our breasts  
The Jewish heart beats true;  
So long as still, towards the East,  
To Zion looks the Jew;

*“I will take you to me  
for a people.”*

*“I will bring you in unto  
the Land.”*

So long our hopes are not yet lost –  
Two thousand years we cherished them –  
To live in freedom in the Land  
Of Zion and Jerusalem.”

In similar vein, I strongly believe that we should always close the Lord’s Supper with a true, joyful anticipation. The Lord is coming. Maranatha!

Let us, in closing, listen once again to Miss von Poseck:

“Faith shall be turned to sight –  
When we reach Home;  
Ended the darksome night,  
When Thou dost come.  
Oh! morning bright and clear  
When we Thy shout shall hear –  
That voice well-known and dear,  
Calling us Home.  
No sighing then, or tears –  
All joy at Home!  
No sorrow, cares or fears –  
Oh, take us Home!  
Lord! Full of love and grace,  
Reveal Thy glorious face;  
Call us to Thine embrace;  
O, come, Lord, come!”

“Even so, come Lord Jesus!”

*I strongly believe that we should  
always close the Lord’s Supper  
with a true, joyful anticipation.  
The Lord is coming.*

# “The Lord loveth Him”

Proverbs 6:16-19; Matthew 3:17 & 17:5.

David Hill

*“As the truth is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21). This is the phrase Paul used to sum up the attributes of human perfection in Him. They are shown in this article in detailed contrast to the abominable characteristics of “the natural man.”*

If the heavens were to express delight in a man, it involved that no feature hated by God should be found in him. Proverbs 6:16-19 lists the features which are an abomination to Jehovah; and by considering their *opposites* we can trace the character and actions of the One of whom the blessed God could say, “Behold My Servant, whom I uphold: Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth” (Isaiah 42:1).

In Matthew chapter 3 we find our Lord coming into public view after a period of thirty years about which very little is recorded of Him. Yet every moment was treasured by the Father, and He said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (v.17). Every facet of His life brought absolute pleasure to the heart of Jehovah before whom He “grew up” (Isaiah 53:2). Far from there being anything in Him which could be hated, He was owned by God as “Beloved.”

We find that same blessed Man towards the close of a public ministry in which He was tested by sinful men. They sought to criticise Him, tempt Him and entangle Him in His talk so that

they might have something of which to accuse Him; they also sought to flatter Him in order to forcefully make Him King. Yet through all He was unmoved, having constantly the will of His God before Him. The Father’s delight in Him remains unchanged, and the words are repeated: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. Surely we do well to “*hear Him*” (Matthew 17:5).

## A humble spirit

The first “abominable feature” of which we read in Proverbs 6 is a *proud look* (v.17). This was first seen in Lucifer, who said, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God” (Isaiah 14:13). It is found, too, at the entrance of sin into this world, in the serpent’s suggestion to Eve, “Ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5). “He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife” (Proverbs 28:25), and the result has been evident in the world ever since. God resists the proud and He regards them afar off (1 Peter 5:5; Psalm 138:6). The very opposite comes into view in our Lord, as so well described for us in Philippians chap-

ter 2. “Who, being in the form of God ... made Himself of no reputation ... And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself.” Rather than seek His own glory He could say to His Father, “I have glorified *Thee* on the earth” (John 17:4). The high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose Name is holy, is found dwelling with Him who is of a humble spirit, with the Man who associates Himself with the contrite (cp. Isaiah 57:15). Well might the apostle begin those wonderful verses in Philippians chapter 2 with “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

### Telling the truth

*A lying tongue* (Proverbs 6:17) also came to light in the Garden of Eden when the earlier bliss of that scene was destroyed. The words of the God of Truth were undermined and denied. Deceit has ever since marked the whole history of man. The Lord Jesus speaks in Matthew 24 of days soon to come when deceit will reach its height; when men will not only believe a lie but some will seek to make lies their refuge (2 Thessalonians 2:11; Isaiah 28:15, 17). How blessed the contrast seen in the One who said, “I am the way, the *truth* and the life”; indeed, the One by whom truth subsists (John 14:6; 1:17).

*A man that hath  
told you the truth*

He prefaced many of His sayings with the words, “Verily, verily”; and referred to Himself as “a man that hath told you the truth” in the presence of those who were of their “father the devil... He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:40, 44). How deeply would the holy soul of our Lord be grieved! “For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against Me: they have spoken against Me with a lying tongue. They compassed Me about also with words of hatred” (Psalm 109:2-3).

### “Doing good”

The product of pride and deception were seen early on in *hands that shed innocent blood* (Proverbs 6:17). “Cain, who was of that wicked one, and *slew his brother* ... [b]ecause his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12). Of the wicked we read that “pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment” (Psalm 73:6). And the extent of man’s violence is seen when he “put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him” (Psalm 55:20). The precious hands of Jesus, who “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), hands which touched the leper and the blind, and never failed to use the power of God for the blessing of men; and were stretched out even in a time of personal need to heal the ear of Malchus – these

*He shed His  
innocent blood  
for the guilty.*

hands were by “wicked hands” (Acts 2:23) nailed to the tree. He shed His innocent blood for the guilty.

**“Thy law in My heart”**

*A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations* is the fourth abomination to Jehovah (Proverbs 6:18). “The heart” should rather suggest the affections, and how often do we read of the compassion of Jesus! Jesus “beholding him loved him” (Mark 10:21); even His enemies drew attention to His love—“Behold how he loved him” (John 11:36). But here we see the heart’s affections as the source for *every* action: His delight was to do the will of God—“Thy law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8). It is recorded that He *loved* righteousness (Psalm 45:7); not only did He *preach* it (Psalm 40:9), but He *fulfilled* righteousness (Matthew 3:15) and *suffered* for it (cp. 1 Peter 2:20-23) in the midst of men whose wickedness was great and whose every imagination of the thoughts of their heart was but evil continually. The heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), and could but respond in hatred against the love which desired their blessing. Very soon righteousness will

reign, and the wicked who in pride persecute the poor will be taken in the devices that they have imagined (cp. Psalm 10:2).

**Beautiful feet**

The feet of Christ, far from *running to mischief* (Proverbs 6:18), were indeed “beautiful upon the mountains” as He brought good tidings and published peace (Isaiah 52:7). He alone could truly say—“I have refrained My feet from every evil way, that I might keep Thy word. I have not departed from Thy judgments” (Psalm 119:101-102). His feet were those which trod the path of true perfection, of faithfulness to God. How happy the contrast of these precious movements with the *feet that are swift in running to mischief*! Those feet will walk “upon a snare. The gin shall take him by the heel” – as seen with Haman (Job 18:9; Esther 8:9). In Proverbs 1:16 we read of feet that “run to evil, and make haste to shed blood”; but the feet that were pierced have been set upon a rock, and His goings are established for ever (Psalm 40:2).

**The true Witness**

To bear *false witness* against a neighbour was to transgress the law, and it is the sixth abomination (Proverbs 6:19). There was no way other than by false witnesses by which the true and faithful Witness (Revelation 3:14), in whom no cause of death was found, could be condemned. Truth, however, must prevail. Their false witness agreed not together (Mark 15:56), and He who

*I have refrained  
My feet  
from every evil way*

came into the world to bear witness unto the truth could challenge them with the words, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil” (John 18:23).

**The Gatherer into one**

The last feature of the list (Proverbs 6:19) is no doubt the most serious of them all – *he that soweth discord among brethren* – and shows the seriousness of that which pride began! How soon the one accord of Acts 2:42-47 was broken! In chapter 5 it was broken by one who sought to acquire a reputation by falsehood, and then in chapter 6 we read of those who murmur, manifesting a party spirit. Paul could warn, “also of your own selves shall men arise ... to draw away disciples after *them*” (Acts 20:30) – and alas! we in our day see the awful culmination of it all. Even those who sought to stand in separation from the systems of men, and for the truth of the one body and the unity of the spirit, have been continually involved in division. Let us make no mistake, this is the enemy’s work, to hinder the testimony and mar the enjoyment of the saints. Beloved, the only remedy is to look steadfastly to the One who should “gather together in one the children of

God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52). He is the true Shepherd, and He alone can bring the one flock to light. He alone is the gathering-point for His own, and He has said that “where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

Only as we have our hearts occupied with this blessed Man who so delighted the heart of God, fulfilling all His will, shall we be able to display the same precious features. May we, each one, be given the grace needed to profit by the exhortation of our chapter in Proverbs (6:20), to keep the Father’s commandment (cp. John 15:10) and to forsake not the law of our mother (cp. Galatians 4:26). Thus we may not only prove the blessedness of guidance, protection and communion, but also enjoy divine light in our dwellings whilst yet in a scene marked by the apostasy to which Christendom is hastening. This is set forth in this very chapter as the evil, strange, whorish woman, indeed an adulteress, who “will hunt for the precious life” (Proverbs 6:26). Her end is seen in Revelation 18, and the call to the saints is to “Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins” (v. 4).

*This article was first published in  
Precious Things, 1973.*



# Letter to a nobleman

John Newton

This letter of John Newton's, the well-known ex-slave trader, though imperfect in expression, evokes the attitude of an Abraham, "desiring a better country, that is, an heavenly."

MY LORD,

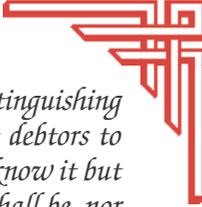
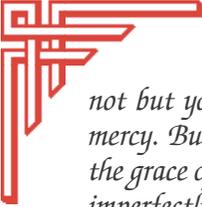
... All that is left for me is to use the liberty you allow me of offering a few hints upon these subjects by letter, not because you know them not, but because you love them.

...The hour is coming when all impediments shall be removed. All distinctions shall cease that are founded upon sublunary<sup>1</sup> things, and the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. Glorious day! May our souls be filled with the thought, and learn to estimate all things around us now, by the view in which they will appear to us then! Then it will be of small moment who was the prince, and who was the beggar, in this life; but who in their several situations sought, and loved, and feared, and honoured the Lord. Alas! how many of the kings of the earth, and the rich men, and the chief captains and the mighty men, will then say (in vain) to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us, and hide us! In the world they are for the most part too busy to regard the commands of God, or too happy to seek his favour: they have their good things here; they please themselves for a while, and in a moment they go down to the grave: in that moment their thoughts perish, their schemes are left unfinished, they are torn from their possessions, and enter upon a new, an untried, an unchangeable, a never-ending state of existence. Alas! is this all the world can afford!

I congratulate you, my Lord, not because God has appointed you to appear in an elevated rank (this, abstracted from the opportunity it affords you of greater usefulness, would perhaps be a more proper subject of condolence); but that he has admitted you to those honours and privileges which come from him only, and which so few, in the superior ranks of life, think worthy of their attention. I doubt

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<sup>1</sup> "Beneath the moon"!



not but you are often affected with a sense of this distinguishing mercy. But though we know that we are debtors, great debtors to the grace of God, which alone has made us to differ, we know it but imperfectly at present. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, nor can we form a just conception of the misery from which we are redeemed, much less of the price paid for our redemption. How little do we know of the Redeemer's dignity, and of the unutterable distress he endured when his soul was made an offering for sin, and it pleased the Father to bruise him, that by his stripes we might be healed. These things will strike us quite in another manner when we view them in the light of eternity. Then—to return to the thought from which I have rambled—then and there I trust we shall meet to the highest advantage, and spend an everlasting day together in happiness and praise. . .

May the cheering contemplation of the hope set before us support and animate us to improve the interval, and fill us with an holy ambition of shining as lights in the world, to the praise and glory of his grace, who has called us out of darkness! Encompassed as we are with snares, temptations, and infirmities, it is possible (by his promised assistance) to live in some good measure above the world while we are in it; above the influence of its cares, its smiles, or its frowns. Our conversation. . . our citizenship, is in heaven. We are not at home, but only resident here for a season, to fulfil an appointed service; and the Lord, whom we serve, has encouraged us to hope that he will guide us by his wisdom, strengthen us by his power, and comfort us by the light of his countenance which is better than life. Every blessing we receive from him is a token of his favour, and a pledge of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which he has reserved for us. O! to hear him say at last, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord!" will be rich amends for all that we can lose, suffer or forbear, for his sake.



Excerpt from letter XI to a nobleman (June 1773). John Newton, *Cardiphonia, or, The Utterance of the Heart in the Course of a Real Correspondence* (Edinburgh, n.d.)

# Daily Cleansing

## The teaching of the “Red Heifer”

Donald Hill

*Any honest believer will be painfully aware of the roots of defilement inside, that are so often activated by seeing or hearing defilement outside. They will know that a holy God cannot have to do with such sin. But what is the remedy? Here is the Scriptural one, as portrayed in the ritual of the “red heifer.”*

### Defilement happens today!

Believers need to be clean in their relationships with a holy God. Though redeemed, we can be easily defiled by contacts with the sinful world through which we are passing. We live in a world with death stamped upon it. Everything in it, that has been shaped and processed by the mind of unbelieving man, has been shaped by a carnal mind, which “is death,” and “enmity against God” (Romans 8:6, 7). Even if our contact with it doesn’t always defile (see Philippians 4:8), it is always liable to defile. We need a remedy against its defilements. As we shall see, the New Testament gives plain teaching on this remedy. But the Law gives a vivid picture, or “type”, of the remedy. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine [to tell us what is right], for reproof [against what is not right], for correction [to put things right], for instruction in righteousness [to keep us right], that the man of God may be perfect...” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). When Paul wrote this, he primarily had the Old Testament in mind.

Numbers is the fourth of the five books of Moses. The first, Genesis, is *the book of origins*, often called ‘the seed-plot of the Bible.’ Exodus, by its name, is *the book of the going out* – of redemption by blood (ch.12) and redemption by power (ch.14). Its aim was that they “might serve God in the wilderness (7:16; 40:34-35). Leviticus is the book of the *going in* – not to the promised land, but to the presence of a holy God. It starts with the offerings which are the basis of that approach.

But Numbers is the book of the *going through* the wilderness, on a journey that, sadly, was marked by murmurings and failure. It is in the Book of Numbers, the book of the wilderness (where we read about Israel’s unbelief and disobedience) that we find the ordinance of the “red heifer” and the “water of separation.”

This ordinance shows God’s provision for the cleansing of His people on their way to the inheritance at the times when they became defiled by death. They were already a redeemed people in virtue of the Passover and the Red Sea. But they were

*How could contact with death be right  
for a people brought into relationship  
with the living God?*

*Numbers 19 tells us how.*

still a dying people, and in the Scripture death is very definitely “the wages of sin” (Romans 6:23). How could contact with death be right for a people brought into relationship with the living God, the God who is not the God of the dead but of the living (Matthew 22:32)? Numbers 19 tells us how. It is a picture for us of how redeemed believers to-day can be cleansed from the foretastings of death all around – that is, the defilements of sin. We too need to be clean in our relationships with a holy God.

Chapter 19 may be divided into two main sections. The first ten verses prescribe how the ashes were to be prepared, that could cleanse from the defilement of death. The remaining verses prescribe how the ashes, mixed with water to constitute “the water of separation” (“purification” in NKJV), were to be applied to defiled persons or possessions. In Numbers 31:20-24, where the Israelites are instructed by God to execute judgment by death on the Midianites, we see a further instance of the application of the “water of separation.”

Let us now examine the prescriptions of Numbers 19 in simple terms to discover their relevance to us in our day.

### **Preparing the ashes**

Verse 2 prescribes which animal’s body was to be burnt to ashes, and its required condition. It was to be a “red heifer.” A “heifer” is a young cow, and perhaps denotes *weakness* and *submissiveness*; and “red” may denote *devotion*. The Lord Jesus was crucified in weakness (2 Corinthians 13:4) and came “to do Thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7). He said, “Not my will but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42). In its condition, the heifer was to be “without spot”; and the Lord “offered Himself without spot to God” (Hebrews 9:14). The heifer’s spotless condition reminds us that the Lord “did no sin” (1 Peter 2:22). There was to be “no blemish” in it; just as “In Him is no sin” (1 John 3:5). And it was to have been under “no yoke;” and the Lord “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Lord Jesus was sinless and as such offered Himself to God.

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Verse 3 prescribes the place where the heifer was to be slaughtered – outside the camp. That was where the Lord Jesus suffered – “without the gate” (Hebrews 13:12).

Verse 4 prescribes where the heifer’s blood was to be presented. It was to be sprinkled seven times before the tabernacle of the congregation. This was the place where Israelites met to commune with God (cp. Exodus 25:22). Our fellowship with the Father and with His Son, as well as our fellowship with each other, is in the abiding value of the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are “redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ.” His blood “cleanseth us from all sin,” so that we might have fellowship with God and with each other (1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 1:5-7). “Seven times” represents the completeness of the power of that blood to cleanse before God.

Verse 5 prescribes the treatment of the heifer’s body. It was completely burnt and reduced to ashes. The Lord Jesus was condemned and judged because of sin. The burning of the heifer indicates the intense sufferings of the Lord Jesus at the hands of a holy God, and the terrible sinfulness of sin. God “delivered Him up for us all.” In the utterness of the judgment of His Son, come in the “likeness of sinful flesh,” God “condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3, 32).

“None could follow there blest Saviour,  
When Thou didst for sins atone,  
For those sufferings, deep, unfathomed,  
Were, Lord Jesus, Thine alone.”

Skin, flesh, blood and dung were all burnt.

Verse 6 prescribes some additions to the fire. Cedar wood denotes man in his greatness (Isaiah 2:12-13; Amos 2:9), but the little hyssop plant, being the opposite of the cedar (1 Kings 4:33), denotes man in his littleness. Scarlet represents man in his glorying (e.g. Lamentations 4:5). All were cast into the burning. This indicates that God’s judgment is passed on all that man is and boasts of; and this is the basis of the application of the “water of separation.”

Verses 7-10 then say that all those involved with the burning of the heifer and the removal of the ashes had to wash both flesh and clothing. Clothes suggest what we are outwardly, the flesh what we are inwardly. “Unclean until evening” reminds us of God’s holiness.

The ashes were taken to a clean place outside the camp.

With this, the prescriptions regarding the preparation of the ashes for cleansing from defilement are complete. Now come the prescriptions for applying them to the defiled person.

*If we are “open vessels”  
– open, that is,  
to defilement –  
we are easily contaminated.*

### Applying the ashes

Contact with death brought immediate uncleanness that lasted for seven days – provided that the “water of separation” was applied (verses 11-13). If not, the unclean state remained. Failure to sprinkle the “water of separation” caused defilement to the tabernacle of the Lord, and the unclean person was not allowed to participate in the tabernacle service.

Defilement in the believer affects our communion, but confession brings forgiveness and restoration of communion. Self-judgment and repentance are needed. “Let a man examine himself” (1 Corinthians 11:28). The instructions regarding the Lord’s supper in 1 Corinthians 11 involved four different “looks.” Paul received the instructions by an *upward* look (“I received of the Lord” – v.23). The instruction itself centred on a *backward* look (“remembrance of me... the Lord’s death” – vv.24-25). It was to be an observance limited with respect to a *forward* look (“Till he come” – v.26). But participation was to be preceded by an *inward* look: “Let a man examine himself” (v.28).

Verses 14-16 define those who needed the application of the “water of separation.” All those who came into contact with death – be it in a tent or in the field – were defiled, as also was every open vessel in a tent where death occurred. We could apply the “tent” to our homes, and “the field” to our wider circles of contact – workplace, school, street and supermarket. In the world we are surrounded by things that defile. And if we are “open vessels” – open, that is, to defilement – we are easily contaminated. We shouldn’t be such “open vessels!” “Whatsoever things are pure” – also “honest,” “just,” “of good report,” and “lovely” – think on these things (Philippians 4:8). This is a very worthwhile consideration.

Verses 17-18 prescribe how the ashes were to be applied to the defiled person or object. This action instructs us to meet defilement with the remembrance of the intense sufferings of the Lord Jesus even unto death “and that the death of the cross.” The running water, into which the ashes were mixed for sprinkling, speaks

of the Holy Spirit conveying to our hearts the reality of His sufferings and death on our account. This should cause us to avoid sin, and to judge ourselves when we fail – and we all do.

“Keep the feast... with the unleavened bread [i.e. free from the inner working of evil] of sincerity and of truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

But it is worth noting that blood is not mentioned. Our judicial cleansing – typified by the sprinkling of the heifer’s blood seven times before the tabernacle (v.4) – took place once for all when we trusted the Lord Jesus as Saviour.

“The sin is on the Saviour laid;  
 ’Tis in His blood sins’ debt is paid:  
 Stern justice can demand no more,  
 And mercy can dispense her store.”

### The instructions applied to us

The ashes mixed with water tell us *how we are to be restored to communion after failure*. The restoration is effected as the Holy Spirit brings home to our hearts the truth concerning the sufferings of Christ. This should cause self-judgment and repentance. Without this there is no restoration. The Holy Spirit effects this by applying to us the words of Scripture. For, as well as speaking of the Holy Spirit, “water” often also speaks of the Scriptures (e.g. Ephesians 5:26). “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord... Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word” (Psalm 119:1, 9). The Word cleanses. “Ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you.” (John 15:3).

### “I will arise”

When the prodigal son in Luke 15 was sitting among the pigs, and hungry, he also had time to reflect. “I will arise and go to my father, and say... I have sinned” (Luke 15:18). He went, and confessed. Restoration took place.

*The restoration is effected  
 as the Holy Spirit brings home to our hearts  
 the truth concerning  
 the sufferings of Christ.*

# Nehemiah's Prayers

Ted Murray.

*Nehemiah's prayers punctuate his account of his highly stressful service for God. Ted draws the lessons out in this complementary study to his now-completed "Look at Nehemiah for today."*

## Claiming the promises of an awesome God

Nehemiah was a man of prayer, and his prayers allow us to glimpse the character of someone who in his day was "God's man of the moment." They are also an example of prayer-ful service in difficult circumstances.

Many facets of Nehemiah's character emerge as his book unfolds. In chapter one we meet a tender-hearted, compassionate man, who was touched by the news he had received of the poverty and feebleness of the Jews who had gone back to Jerusalem. He was not impulsive, for we read in 1:4 that he sat down and wept, and mourned for many days. What went through his mind at that time, the Scripture does not record. However, as we read his first recorded prayer (1:5-11) we are allowed to see something of the relationship that existed between Nehemiah and his God. It was a distant, almost a fearful, relationship (vv.5-7). But three points come to the fore for us: (i) the acknowledgement of God's greatness; (ii) the claim on God's faithfulness; and (iii) the confession of sins.

We also see in this prayer how he first vindicates God (v.5). He states where God dwells, and uses the words, "great and awesome", to describe God's nature. Let us

never forget that the One whom we know as Father, and whose nature is love, is also the same One who is described as great and awesome in this verse. It behoves us, too, in the day of grace, to remember whom we are addressing in our prayers. The Lord taught the disciples to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9, AV). Our relationship with God is now on the terms of "a new covenant," and is a relationship of nearness. But we ought to have a reverential respect when we address the Father.

### A cry for help!

In Nehemiah's second prayer (2:4), we see a man who has a very close relationship with his God. He



has great confidence in God, realizing that He is always on hand and available to help in a time of need (cp. Hebrews 4:16). Nehemiah's actual words are not recorded in this case, but the implication is that he was desperate. He doesn't wait for a suitable time or a convenient place. The Scripture records that he "prayed to the God of heaven and ... said to the king" (2:4-5). If the king, whose cupbearer he was, became angry, then Nehemiah's life could have been in peril. Knowing this, Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven." Many a person, when danger is imminent, cries out to God for help as a last resort. But this cry was the normal reaction of a man who knows and walks with God day by day!

Although Nehemiah's prayer is not recorded, God's answer is (vv. 6, 8) – and what an answer! As we consider this incident we ought to be encouraged. Our faith in God should grow as we recall our resources in Him – of which Peter reminds us in 2 Peter 1:1-4. And in his first letter (5:7) Peter tells us to cast "all your care upon Him for He cares for you" (NKJV).

### **Cries for vindication**

Nehemiah's third prayer comes in 4:4-5. It shows him interceding for the builders of the wall and identifying himself with them. This chapter shows further facets of his character. He is a man who is affected by the scorn and reproach of the opposition, but also a man of action. The builders' problem was that they were having to use second-rate materials. And it wasn't neatly stacked for their use: they had to search through the rubble for suitable pieces of stone to build with. And, all the while, they were being mocked for it.

This caused Nehemiah heartache and concern. What was he to do to keep the builders' spirits up? Once more we see a man who has a sure resource in God. In our day, when we are finding things hard, and new "living stones" do not seem readily available for building up the assembly, are we, like Nehemiah, reminding the Lord that we are also despised and in reproach from the society around us? Nehemiah's prayer seems to us rather strange, in asking the Lord to take vengeance on the men who provoked him. To day is the day of grace, the day of God's patience with men and our prayers are to be focused on the Lord's saving power.

*This cry was the normal reaction  
of a man who knows and walks  
with God day by day!*

## *The Lord reminds us also to “watch and pray”*

But the day of vengeance will indeed descend upon the world, when in Paul's words, “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

We should also take heed to the *action* that Nehemiah took. In 4:9 we read that they made their prayers and set a watch. They were diligent, and, correspondingly, the Lord reminds us also to “watch and pray” (Matthew 24:42; 26:41).

In 5:19, we have Nehemiah's fourth prayer. In this chapter he has to deal with the domestic and social squabbles that were afflicting Jerusalem. This placed him in a most difficult, indeed a “no-win” situation! Whatever he did would offend someone. In it we see Nehemiah as a man of discretion but also of great principle regarding what is right. We also see that, like us today, he suffered from uncertainty (v.7); but having done what he considered to be right before God, he asks God to remember him for good according to all that he had done for the people. It is often in domestic and social activities that great difficulties occur; and in this case we see the even-handed action of a man who was conscious of God's Law and prepared to uphold its demands. In the church today we are to be governed by the Lord's desire that “we love one another”, showing to the world that we are His disciples (John 13:34-35).

### **Strengthen my hands!**

In chapter six Nehemiah is being subjected to personal persecution. The enemies had failed in their efforts against the people rebuilding the walls, and instead decided to attack Nehemiah, whom they had identified as the leader. In verse 9 we see his thoughts are not fully self-centred, but include his fellow-builders. But he is aware that he himself also needs to be strengthened – and he doesn't mean physical strength! He is under great pressure from what had occurred in the previous chapter and now from the conspiracy against him personally. How often this situation occurs in this present day! Problems arise in a church and then the person who has the moral courage to sort the matter out is subjected to personal opposition. Like Nehemiah in verses 9 and 14, we have to both ask the Lord for strength when these occasions occur, and also that He would quell the opposition, and bring peace once more, in order that the church can continue to witness for the Lord.

## Remember, O my God!

Four times in chapter 13 Nehemiah is mentioned as praying – in vv.14, 22, 29 and 31. Each prayer commences with a plea that God would *remember*. In considering the first of these prayers we have to be aware of what had taken place in the previous verses. The temple worship was at a standstill because the Levites had not been supported during Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem. Tobiah, the enemy of the work, had been given accommodation in one of the storehouses in the temple precincts. Things were at a very low ebb, and Nehemiah's great concern on his return from the capital (v.6) is to re-establish the proper functions of the temple. Here we see his character as one who is jealous for the things of the Lord. Having ejected Tobiah, re-established the tithe of grain, new wine and oil, and appointed faithful treasurers, then he prays that God will remember what he has done for the house of his God and its services (v.14). Nehemiah didn't have the benefit of New-Testament teaching regarding the judgment seat of Christ, when rewards will be given out to those who deserve them (2 Corinthians 5:10; cp. Matthew 25:21, etc; 2 Timothy 4:8). It would seem that he felt vulnerable through what he had done, and needed some re-assurance from the Lord for his righteous actions.

His second prayer in this final chapter follows the account of his action in closing the gates of Jerusalem to stop Sabbath-day trading. Forcing the people to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" would both hit the pockets of the traders and offend the people who bought from them. It must have caused a commotion! This time Nehemiah throws himself on the greatness of God's mercy (v.22), for he would receive little mercy either from those whose pockets had been affected, or from those stopped from going round to the corner shop for a little something on the Sabbath! Seemingly feeling isolated from the goodwill of the people, Nehemiah has only one resource, and that is God Himself. What a lesson for us today who have access to that same resource! We have a "merciful and faithful high priest" (Hebrews 2:17).

In his third prayer of the chapter (v.29), Nehemiah prays that God would remember those who defiled the priesthood and all that had been established for worshipping God in the divinely appointed way. Here we see a man who was governed by what was laid down by God in the Scriptures, and who would not

*Feeling isolated,  
Nehemiah has only one resource*

*Do we pray that our worship may not be defiled  
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during the rest of the week?*

compromise. He doesn't ask God to remove the opposition; he just asks that God would remember them for the defilement they had caused. We also have to be aware of what mars our daily communion and worship of the Lord, and ask Him to remove it from our minds. We are instructed to set our minds (or, affections) on things above, where Christ is, and not on the things of earth (Colossians 3:1,2). Nehemiah's desire was that God would be glorified in the city of Jerusalem and worshipped in its temple. We are reminded of the clause of the prayer which the Lord taught the disciples, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." In heaven the Father is worshipped, on earth He seeks worshippers (John 4:23). Are we included in the company of those on earth that worship the Father in spirit and in truth? Do we pray that our worship may not be defiled by what we have been occupied with during the rest of the week? This is what seemed to have been Nehemiah's burden as he prayed for those who had defiled the priesthood.

Finally we come to Nehemiah's last recorded prayer (v.31). Here he just asks the Lord to bless him. He recognizes that he needs to be encouraged, that he needs protection, that he needs to walk in faith before the people of his day, and that he needs strength to carry out the task of maintaining the testimony of the Lord amongst a people prone to backsliding. So he asks God to "remember him for good." Like Nehemiah, we too need blessing in our day and it is good to seek it from God on our lives. We need His help in times of need, particularly to maintain the testimony of the gospel and continue to teach the church the things that have been handed down to faithful men (cp. 2 Timothy 2:2).

In considering Nehemiah's prayers, we have been able to identify circumstances similar to those we have to confront today. Let us learn from his example – his awareness of need, and his desire to maintain what was taught in the Scriptures – as we pray and seek to please the Lord. Amen.

*Here he just asks the Lord to bless him.*

# Hebrews and the Heavenly Calling

Theo Balderston

*“Arise and depart, For this is not your rest” (Micah 2:10 NKJV).*

## The people’s opium?

A potent present-day attack on the character of Christianity comes from within: the undermining of the truth of the heavenly calling. Only by embracing this truth can Christians rightly witness to Christ in the world – as a crucified, risen and glorified Saviour, rightly follow Him as people who have taken up their cross, rightly teach new believers as people delivered “out of this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4), and adopt the right political attitude for followers of a Saviour who “opened not his mouth” in self-defence and whose “kingdom is not from here” (Isaiah 53:7; John 18:36).

Some Christians have been intimidated by the jibe that Christianity is “pie in the sky when you die,” by Marx’s jeer that heaven is the “opium of the people,” and by sneers that some Christians are “too heavenly-minded to be any earthly use.” They have sought to deflect these attacks by de-emphasising heaven and by eagerly asserting the relevance of Christianity to the planet’s problems (as defined by current godless leaders of thought). Consequently they have fielded the Old-Testament prophets as proofs of the need for Christian engagement in just political campaigns, encouraged Christian involvement in the culture of the world (contrary to 1 John 2:15-17 and James 4:4), and consigned heaven to a sort of gospel-appendix – necessary, but kept out of sight.

The Christian is a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20). No true Christian will deny that. But this truth will be swamped by trying to run it alongside an equal or greater emphasis on the Christian’s *active* citizenship of the world. Scripture teaches our *passive* citizenship of the world in respect of submission (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Matthew 22:21), but not our active appropriation of its power. Paul did not despise the legal protection afforded by his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25; 25:10). Even so, he regarded the

*A potent present-day attack on the character of Christianity comes from within*

*Paul regarded the apostles as outsiders of society*

*The Christian's political duty is mainly performed in the prayer meeting*

apostles as outsiders of society, having no status in this world, and indeed “the scum of all things.” He said that this is not “reigning time” for the Christian (1 Corinthians 4:8-13).

Saying this is not at all intended to deny that we are to be “zealous of good works” – compassionate relief of need

being high among them (Titus 2:14). It is not even meant to deny that on occasion Christians might seek a political or judicial remedy for clear-cut cases of wrong and oppression. Wilberforce saw such a case in the slave trade. Such campaigns had their Christian costs; but when Christians so act, “to their own master they stand or fall;” and we “judge not, that we be not judged” (Romans 14:4; Matthew 7:1).

It is a question of where the heart is. And that, so the Lord told us, is decided by where the treasure is. Christ, our treasure, is in heaven: our heart should be there! Any incursions into the political sphere will be considered occasional, atypical, and out-of-character for Christians, and not, as frequently today, more or less the pith and marrow of practical Christianity. The Christian's political duty is mainly performed in the prayer meeting, so the New Testament tells us (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

### **“Sit at my right hand”**

The “heavenly calling” denotes God's Voice in His Son calling us from heaven, and to heaven (Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:10; 12:25). The phrase itself occurs only once in Scripture (Hebrews 3:1), but conveniently summarises the New-Testament teaching as to the outworking of Psalm 110:1 in the life of the Christian. Psalm 110:1 is said to be the Old-Testament text most frequently quoted in the New. “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (NKJV). The letter to the Hebrews, which quotes or clearly alludes to it at four key points (1:3 & 13; 8:1, 10:12; 12:2), can be thought of as a systematic exposition of this outworking.

The writer of Hebrews wrote primarily to Jewish converts (Hebrews 13:13) in order to explain the meaning for them of the peculiar moment in which they had believed in Messiah – a time *before* “the day of His power,” when His enemies would be made His footstool

*The “heavenly calling” denotes God's Voice in His Son calling us from heaven, and to heaven*

(Psalm 110:3), but *during* the time of His waiting at the right hand of God for that day (Hebrews 2:8-9). Such believers are “all of one” with him. They are “the children” whom Christ has gained in the time of His rejection, just as Isaiah’s children were associated with him at a time when the nation refused his prophecies (Hebrews 2:11, 13; cp. Isaiah 8:11-18). The counterpart of their belief in Christ during His rejection is that their destination is “glory” – i.e. His *present* place (2:10, 3:1; 6:20). Their hope is not the conventional Jewish one of restoration of the kingdom on earth to Israel after the judgment of Messiah’s enemies. That day will come, so it is implied in 13:11-12. No Jewish reader would have failed to spot that the sacrifices whose bodies were “burned outside the camp” made atonement for those *inside* the camp (cp. Leviticus 4:3, 12, 13, 21; 16:27). The writer implies that in time to come the death of Messiah would result in the restoration of Israel (cp. Acts 1:7). But he merely *implies* this, since his aim is to deflect his readers from this *earthly* hope (just as the Lord’s was in Acts 1:8ff), and focus it on the heavenly city to come (Hebrews 11:16; 13:14).

### What is the “rest”?

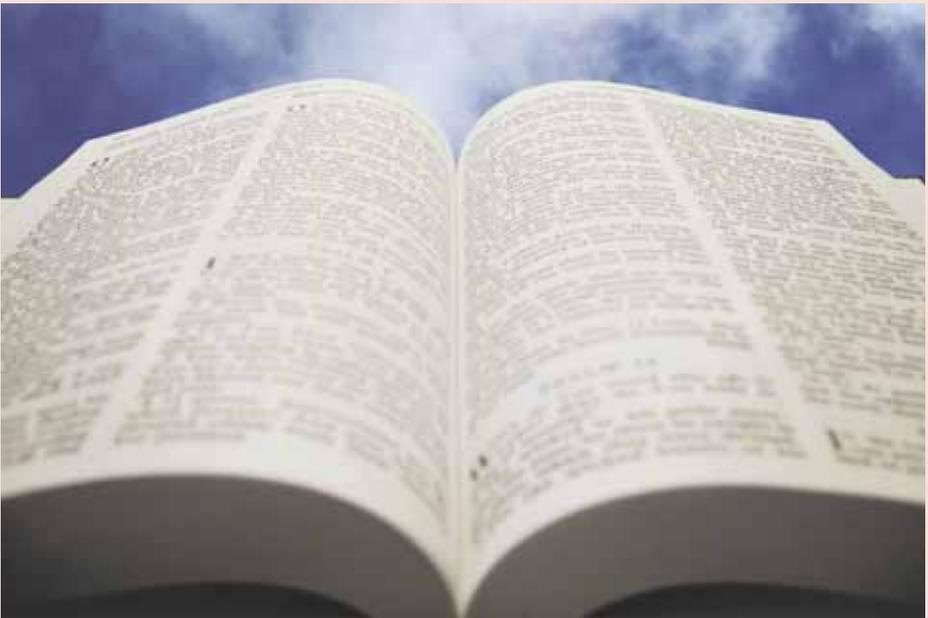
Therefore, the writer solemnly warns his readers in 3:7 – 4:10 of the serious implications of refusing God’s Voice calling them into His heavenly rest. The writer has underlined that God’s Voice to us is the eternal Son in His present place of heavenly supremacy (ch.1). He has explained that the Son was not originally a Man, but *became* Man in order to suffer death, bring “many sons to glory,” and exercise in perfection a dominion like (but much larger than) that which Adam spoiled (ch.2). Therefore Messiah is infinitely superior to Moses who had been the human conduit of Israel’s relationship with God (3:5, 6). By lifting them outside the system that flowed through Moses, the writer can address them as “partakers of a heavenly calling,” and warn them to “hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (3:6). He means the *heavenly* hope, as he goes on to explain with the aid of Psalm 95:7d-11. He points out that the “rest,” to which the psalmist referred in v.11, cannot mean that enjoyed in Canaan in Old Testament times, because the psalm, which was composed when the people were already in the land, speaks of “the rest” as something future (Hebrews 4:8).

The writer to the Hebrews emphasises the “my” of “my rest,” to say that it is *God’s own* rest (4:3-5). That was a resting from the labour of creation; therefore the “rest” which Psalm 95 mentions is also a resting from labour, and, indeed, an *eternal* and *heavenly* rest. Fine, we might say: every Christian hopes for that at the end of his or her earthly journey. Yes, says the writer, but we ought to be striving *now* to enter it (4:11)! Many commentators have denied that the “rest” in Hebrews 3-4 is the heavenly rest, and defined it simply as the rest from “dead works” in the

finished work of Christ. They aren't exactly wrong, since the one is the mirror image of the other. But when the writer uses God's resting from *His* works as comparison for believers resting from *their* works (4:10), it is unlikely that he has his readers' "dead works" in mind. The writer means that God purposes to bring those who presently believe in Christ into a place where *all* work is over; and this is the rest enjoyed by Christ *now*, who, "having offered one sacrifice for sins," has "sat down" (Hebrews 10:11-12).<sup>1</sup>

### Entering that rest

How, then, can the readers "be diligent to enter that rest" (4:11)? The answer to this may be said to occupy most of the remainder of the letter. Firstly the writer spends much time reassuring these Jewish believers of the certainty of what they no doubt already believed, namely, that the way into heaven *has indeed been opened up*. In his own words, he leads them "on to perfection" (6:1). He starts with the *Person* who is Himself the Guarantee. He is a High Priest who is eternal in virtue of his eternal Sonship, and heavenly in His present position, and yet has



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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to many commentators, the "we... do enter" of 4:3 defines the *people* who enter (i.e. "we," and not the people of v.2), rather than the *time* of their entering. If this verse referred to the present rest of faith in the finished work of Christ and not to the ultimate effect of that work, it ought surely to read, "We who have believed have entered that rest" – the "rest" being coterminous with the "believing."

*Faith  
concerning  
things to come*

also been in this world and is “touched with the feeling of [their] infirmities” (4:15 AV). *In His Person* “He is able” to lead them there (5:9-10; 6:20; 7:1-3, 24-26).

The writer then turns to the *work* of this Person. His Priesthood is not of this age or creation (9:9, 11), and the writer leads them into the higher truth

(6:1) that His sacrifice at Calvary was perfectly completed on earth, but its efficacy pertains to heaven and eternity (8:4; 9:12-14). His death has not consecrated earthly things to be the means of a relationship with God appropriate to this present age (cp. Exodus 24:6ff), but rather *heavenly things* as the true environment of our relationship with God (Hebrews 9:23ff). And the effect is that His blood *already* gives us entrance into the holiest in heaven where He is (10:19-22). In this vital, yet preliminary, sense, we certainly enter the rest of God now! But, note well: “in full assurance of *faith*.”

This, then, leads the matter round to their side. Having shown the total competence of the Person and work of their High Priest to bring them to glory, the writer turns to what *they* will need: *faith*. But what is faith? “Entering the holiest” involved his readers in *not* offering a lamb or a bird to God in expiation of an unwitting sin. Jews would certainly need “full assurance of faith” for this. However the word “faith” is predominantly used in Hebrews to mean “faith concerning things to come” (11:1; 13, 20). *By faith* the readers had to lay hold of the fact that *the place where the blood of Christ availed – heaven itself – was now their homeland*, and venture all on the prospect of that unseen country, incurring, in the process, “the reproach of Christ” (11:26). The length of chapter 11 shows the importance of this.

This would be their “diligence in entering that rest.”

**A heavenly identity**

We are Gentile believers, but as made “fellow-heirs, of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel” with these Jewish believers (Ephesians 3:6 NKJV), we, from our different starting-point, share what was written to them in Hebrews.

*The patriarchs didn't think that they had to engage with the high or low culture of the Canaanites.*

The main outworking of “faith” emphasised in Hebrews 11 is *strangerness* in this world. Canaan was a land of cities, but Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, though by no means poor, “sojourned... as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents” (11:9). In fact the only real estate Abraham owned in Canaan was a grave, and when buying it he gave the testimony reported in v.13 (cp. Genesis 23:4). Unlike many present-day believers, the patriarchs didn’t think that they had to engage with the high or low culture of the Canaanites. Rather, their lifestyle showed them to be citizens of another country. They used the world without making full use of it (1 Corinthians 7:31). Similarly, Joseph is not held out as an example in Hebrews 11:22 for his wise use of his God-given power in Egypt, but only for his instructions regarding the removal of his bones out of Egypt into Canaan – showing that Egypt never was a home to him. Moses abandoned a position of power and pleasure in Egypt, “for he looked to the reward” (11:26).

Similarly, Paul says that “our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for the Saviour...” He refers them to his own example of having counted even the best things of earth as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord (Philippians 3:8, 17, 20). He tells how the apostles’ faces and testimony reflected the heavenly glory of an ascended Christ, whereas their life in this world partook of His sentence of crucifixion. *All* Paul’s hopes, and *everything* he was working for were bound up with the coming glory (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6-18). He sought conformity in this world to the *dying* of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also might be manifested in his body (cp. 2 Corinthians 4:10-11).

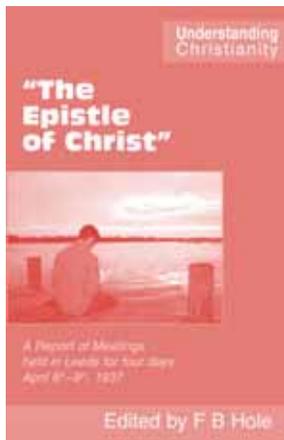
### Conclusion

How about us? Are we “partaking of [our] heavenly calling”? Is our spiritual eye on heaven “where Christ is” (Colossians 3:1)? Do our lives proclaim that “we seek a better, that is, a heavenly, country”? In our work for the Lord, do we try to appropriate the world’s power, or the weakness of the Crucified? Does “death” in any sense “work in us” that “life” might germinate in others? (2 Corinthians 4:12) Some imperfect approximation to these deeply moving mindsets of the patriarchs and the apostles will (to paraphrase D.L. Moody) stop us from being so earthly-minded as to be no heavenly use!

*Do our lives proclaim that “we seek  
a better, that is, a heavenly, country”?*

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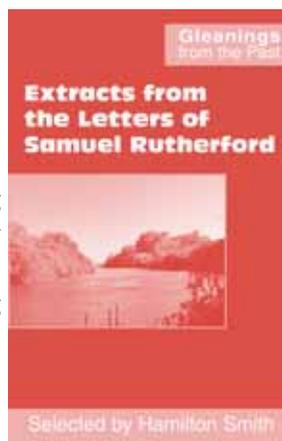
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## A Stranger Here

I am a stranger here; I do not crave  
a home on earth, that gave Thee but a grave;  
I wish not now its jewels to adorn  
my brow, which gave Thee but a crown of thorn.  
Thy cross has severed ties which bound me here,  
—Thyself my treasure in a heavenly sphere.

No earthly city—(by man's labour built,  
whose greatness is but congregated guilt, [...])  
where self reigns lord in temple, hall and mart)—  
has now a hold on my enfranchised heart.  
A freed man now, whom truth indeed makes free,  
there's no continuing city here for me.  
A city yet to come, with longing eyes  
I now am seeking, built above the skies;  
whose strong foundations God Himself has laid,  
like a fair bride, in whitest robes arrayed.

Without the camp—where Christ was crucified,  
and the Sin-offering for His people died,  
to sanctify them from this world below,  
—to Him, and His reproach, I gladly go;  
for all, compared with Him, I dross esteem,  
my one desire is, to be found in Him.

**James George Deck (1807-1884)**