

Scripture Truth



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Psalm 115:

Exhortation praise

What the Lord is to His people

“At an hour that you think not”

A Quick Glance at some Short Papers!

Creation teaching in the Old Testament

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

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“Waiting for the Coming”

by J T Mawson

130 pages; paperback; published: **28 February 2011**;
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This new edition provides a highly readable exploration of the important subject of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. First published in 1934, based on a series of Bible studies from *Scripture Truth* in 1933, it convincingly shows that this coming again will be in two stages – the coming *for* His saints (the *Rapture*) and *with* them (the *Appearing*); and presents each Christian with the challenge: “Am I waiting for the Coming?”

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“At an hour that you think not”

The Lord was not saying here that He would come again at an “hour” when some people *other than ourselves*, some *future* people, would not be expecting it (Luke 12:40). The context forbids us to postpone our looking for His coming until after some as yet unfulfilled event, be it the “great tribulation”, be it the conversion of all nations. He said it to the disciples, and I find no indication in the context here that they were not to start expecting His coming from the moment of His ascension. And He expressly warned them against “waiting fatigue.” “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching... And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants” (vv.37-38, NKJV). “Waiting fatigue” is the ailment most likely to afflict readers of this magazine. We hold the truth of the Lord’s any-moment coming theoretically, but have relegated it to the shelf for “doctrines of no practical consequence.” Let’s bear in mind that that’s just how the average unbeliever treats *death*. He / she lives for all practical purposes as if death is something that won’t happen.

“Watching” means “being alert.” We don’t know that the Lord is coming in the near future, but we have to be alert every day that He *might* come today. How easy to slide into the thought, “My master is delaying his coming,” so that we start treating fellow-believers badly and living for present enjoyment (vv.45ff).

But “the Master” is also looking for something: to find *us working* when He comes. “It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch, therefore, for you do not know when the Master of the house is coming” (Mark 13:34-35). He gave “to *each* his work” – no believer is exempt. We should *all* be heartily at work for Him, but our dearest hope should be that He will come one unremarkable day, and call us home with our work unfinished.



Theo Balderston

Looking

Donald Hill

Right now, millions of pairs of eyes are closed in sleep. On the other hand, millions of pairs of eyes are open and looking. Some of these eyes are looking at a beautiful sunset, a new-born baby or a colourful floral display. Others are looking for that evasive bunch of keys, an important document, or even a lost child. Soldiers in a battle zone are looking to an officer to make that life or death decision. We also talk about “looking back” or “looking forward”.

As believers, where is our gaze directed?

“O, fix our earnest gaze,
so wholly Lord on Thee,
that with Thy beauty occupied,
we elsewhere none may see.”¹

What a lovely occupation! Let’s think a little more closely about Who and what we should be looking at.

I The initial look.



“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22, KJV). What a wonderful day it was when we “looked to” the Lord Jesus and trusted in His work on the cross for our eternal salvation. We imitated those Israelites in the wilderness who, due to their sin, were bitten by deadly serpents, but were invited by God just to look towards the brazen serpent lifted up on the pole; and they lived (Numbers 21:4-9; cp. John 3:14-15). For:

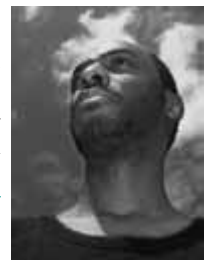
“There is life in a look at the crucified one,
there is life at this moment for thee,
then look, sinner, look unto Him and be saved,
unto Him who was nailed to the tree.”²

Having made that initial “look” we have embarked on our Christian journey.

What next?

2 “Looking unto Jesus”

“Let us run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus” (Hebrews 12:1,2). The Christian life is not being compared here to a one-hundred-metre sprint that lasts less than ten



¹ C.A. Bernstein (1674-99).

² Amelia M. Hull, c. 1860.

seconds. It's a marathon that needs *endurance*. If we look to ourselves for inner resources to keep going, we don't have them! We obtain them by "looking unto Jesus" – One who Himself has run the race and completed the course. For Him it entailed suffering, shame, a crown of thorns, a cruel cross and abandonment by a holy God on account of your sins and mine. But we "look to Him," not as One still running, but as the One who said, "It is finished!," who *was* the Man of Calvary, but who *is* now "set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (v.2). He is there as our Forerunner (6:20); and what "keeps us going" is that seeing Him there assures us that we soon shall be there as well. Wonderful day when we shall be with Christ! But meanwhile we are to be:

3 "Looking for a city"



Abram left behind a man-made city – Ur of the Chaldees – when he answered the call of God. Its citizens were idolaters – worshippers of the moon god (Joshua 24:2). Instead, we meet Abraham in Canaan with his tent and altar (Genesis 12:8). He was a pilgrim in this world and a worshipper with his eyes on "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Our links with this world are temporary – for "here we have no continuing city" (13:14). In the light of this our focus should be on the city that God builds. John saw it from the high mountain – a great city, the holy Jerusalem, symbolic of the bride, the Lamb's wife, and displaying the glory of God (Revelation 21:9-11).

"Oh day of wondrous promise,
the bridegroom and the bride
are seen in glory ever,
for ever satisfied!"³

³ Edward Cronin (1801-1882).

*We "look
to Jesus"
as the
One who
is now
"set down
at the
right
hand of
the throne
of God"*

People in this world hope for many things, and seldom are their hopes entirely, or at all, realised. Is *this* where our real hopes are, or are they in *that city*? Some self-examination needed here!

4 “Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing...”



Verse 11 of Titus 2 belongs to the past, verse 12 applies to the present. But verse 13 looks to the future – “that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” The believer’s hope is sure and certain. The Lord Jesus will call His saints – His church, His bride – and we shall be raptured to glory. We shall see Him, we shall surround Him, we shall be like Him, and shall praise Him for evermore. Am I, are you, looking daily for this hope to be realised?

And what a day for this world when the Lord Jesus appears in glory! No longer the lowly babe of Bethlehem, the “Stranger of Galilee”, He will appear in power and glory to execute judgment against all that is offensive to a holy God, and to set up the kingdom in which He will reign in righteousness over the earth for one thousand years. Government in the hands of men for the past six thousand years has been marked by failure, but in that day, “a king shall reign in *righteousness*” (Isaiah 32:1).

“Oh the joy to see Thee reigning
Thee, my own beloved Lord!
Every tongue Thy Name confessing,
worship, honour, glory, blessing,
brought to Thee with glad accord!
Thee, my Master and my Friend,
vindicated and enthroned!
unto earth’s remotest end
glorified, adored and owned!”⁴

5 Looking for new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells

There are many mockers to question the promise of the Lord’s coming (2 Peter 3:3-4). The same thing happened in Noah’s time, when the indifferent and the mockers perished, whilst Noah and his family were safe in the ark. Analogously, the present earth and heaven are going to pass away but believers will be “safe in Christ.” So we can, with Christian confidence, look on to a day when righteousness will not only



⁴ Frances Ridley Havergal, 1873.

reign but *dwell!* Everything will be in accordance with God's holy mind, for it will all have been established on the basis of what the Lord Jesus accomplished at Calvary. Our eyes, rather like John's, can jump the entire intervening period up to the Lord's return and even beyond the millennium, to see the day when God will make all things new (Revelation 21:5). But not so as to pretend away the present! This is still the day of God's grace, and He is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). Are we fervently reaching out to the lost in view of that coming "great white throne" from which heaven and earth will flee away, and when all whose names are not found written in the book of life will be irretrievably lost?

6 Looking at the eternal things

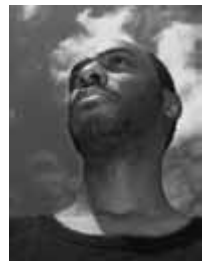


This is a paradox: Paul spent his life looking at unseen things! (2 Corinthians 4:18) He described the "seen things" as "light affliction" which is "but for a moment". We are left in no doubt as to how severe and continual the afflictions were that Paul suffered because of his faithful witness. They started just after his conversion, when he escaped from his would-be murderers by being let down the walls of Damascus in a basket. They lasted throughout his life of witness as he was hounded by enemies (11:23-33). Why did he consider them to be "light" and "momentary"? (4:17) Because he had his eye on that eternal goal – a building of God – "an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (5:1). He looked not at the temporal, seen things, but at the eternal. Let us keep going on, and at the same time *looking up!*

Fundamental to all the above are the two ways in which John the Baptist "looked on" the Lord Jesus:

7 "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

If a dandelion rears its head on your lawn, the removal of the flower and leaves will not solve the problem. You have to remove the root! And *sin* is the root, of which *sins* are the fruit. "Sin" is the word used by John the Baptist in John 1:29, and it gets down to the "root" of the matter. That principle and power of sin, which is totally obnoxious in the eyes of a holy God, was dealt with in finality by the One who wore the crown of thorns and suffered the cruel cross of Calvary. *The Lamb*, foreordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20) and portrayed in typical teaching in the Old Testament, could alone through His death deal both with *sins* and with *sin* itself:



- Abel's lamb was the ground of Abel's acceptance (Genesis 4:4).
- Abraham told Isaac, "God will provide a lamb" (Genesis 22:8).
- The Passover lamb had to be without blemish (Exodus 12:5).
- Isaiah prophesied, "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter" (53:7).
- Peter looked back and affirmed, "Redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).
- The song of the redeemed in time to come will be, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power... and honour... for ever and ever" (Revelation 5:12-13).

In that day sin, which in its enormity has plagued the nations since Eden, will be totally removed from the world. Then

"All taint of sin will be removed,
all evil done away,
and we shall dwell with God's Beloved
through God's eternal day!"⁵

And God will "rest in His love" (Zephaniah 3:17).

8 "Looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, "Behold the Lamb of God."

John's second comment (John 1:35-36), had a dramatic effect on two of his disciples: they left him and followed Jesus. They were attracted to the Lord Jesus by what they observed of Him, and He became their centre of gathering. It's



good when we gather to the Name of the Lord Jesus and claim His promise to be in the midst – for we are in the right place. We need to give the Lord Jesus the central place, losing sight of others and of the orderings of men.

"O pilgrim bound for the heavenly land,
never lose sight of Jesus,
He'll gently lead you with loving hand,
never lose sight of Jesus.
Never lose sight of Jesus,
never lose sight of Jesus,
day and night He will lead you right,
never lose sight of Jesus!"⁶

They were attracted to the Lord Jesus by what they observed of Him, and He became their centre of gathering.

⁵ J.G. Deck (1807-1884).

⁶ Johnson Oatman, Jr. (1856-1922).

Learning from Samson

Theo Balderston

*“In all your ways acknowledge Him” (Proverbs 3:6, NKJV) – ALL your ways.
This was what Samson didn’t do, and it led to disaster.*

Samson, sad to say, is a warning. How many look back to wish that they had learned his lesson earlier! No doubt he wished it himself, too.

The enemy’s willing slaves

Samson and Israel deserved each other. The book of Judges records Israel’s repeated lapses into the idolatry of their heathen neighbours – neighbours they should not have left living in the land (1:21 – 2:3). These lapses were only rectified when God “sold” them into the hand of some foreign oppressor, and they repented and “cried to Him” for deliverance. God always heard their cry, and raised up a judge who delivered them (e.g., 2:11 – 23). However, in the last recorded case of this in Judges, when Israel had to serve the Philistines *forty years*, they did *not* cry for deliverance (13:1ff). They evidently preferred their comfortable servitude to the inconvenience of deliverance. How up-to-date! In a world where TV, radio, and IT in the home and on the move mean that we need never be out of reach of a man-made, artificial universe of popular or high culture, or of seemingly dizzying human possibilities – whether humanistically moral or humanly depraved, self-improving or self-destroying – in such a world the devil has constructed his most total system ever for making even believers his willing slaves.

Samson’s will ≠ God’s will

And yet God is a “God of all grace.” Despite Israel’s inertness (or perhaps because of it) He pre-announced the birth of another deliverer to the parents-to-be (Judges 13). No other judge’s birth was pre-announced. The LORD also prescribed a lifestyle for the unborn child. No previous judge had had his life mapped out in advance. Samson was to be a lifelong Nazirite (13:5, 7). Naziriteship was normally a time-limited vow to observe a period of special separation to God (Numbers 6:1-5, 13ff; cp. Acts 18:18; 21:23-4). But Samson’s lifelong *separation* was surely intended to be a lifelong witness against the people’s *assimilation* to the surrounding idolatry. To impress this mission on his parents, Samson’s mother was to take much care to eat nothing



*Instead of being in the
vanguard of separation,
Samson was in the
vanguard of assimilation*

unclean all the time she was carrying the unborn child. Nor was she to drink any alcohol (Judges 13:7,14). Naziriteship involved abstinence from alcohol (Numbers 6:3,4). Alcohol lowers the inhibitions that normally control unguarded fleshly acts. Samson was to live a life of self-control.

Samson should have been a Daniel all his life (Daniel 1:8; 6:10). But, unlike Daniel, he “blew it.” He was brought up in the borderlands between Israel and Philistia (Judges 13:1, 25), where the ungodliness of the Philistines should have most distressed the Israelites. But instead of being in the vanguard of separation to the LORD, Samson was in the vanguard of assimilation to the Philistine population. “And Samson went down to Timnah [only about five miles from home], and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. So he went up, and told his father and mother, saying... ‘Now therefore, get her for me as a wife’” (14:1-2, NKJV).

The Law did not prohibit marrying Gentile women in general, but it did prohibit marriages with the inhabitants of the Land, to stop the seepage of idolatry into Israel (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3,4). This command-

ment was never more apposite than during this comfortable adjustment of Israel to Philistine overlordship. But Samson’s parents failed to face him up with the commandment. Their question why there wasn’t any Israelite girl to please him sounded defeated as it was asked (Judges 14:3). Had they shown similar want of firmness throughout Samson’s boyhood, despite all the angel of the LORD had impressed on them? In reply, Samson rudely repeated his demand, “Get her for me, for she pleases me well.” His own will and his own way were what mainly mattered to Samson. It doesn’t really seem as if he gave much thought to his divine commission at all. If he did, he was going to fit it into a life in which his own will and pleasures reigned undisturbed.

This was Samson’s mistake, and it ruined his life. Eventually he learned that

“Across the will of nature
leads on the path of God;
not where the flesh delighteth,
the feet of Jesus trod.
O, bliss to leave behind us
the fetters of the slave,
to leave *ourselves* behind us,
the grave-clothes and the grave!”¹

But he learned it only in order to die. Matters were not as clear-cut for Old-Testament believers as they are for us. In that dispensation Israelites were still under the trial of the Law; and it was

¹ Gerhard Ter Steegen, “Pilgrim song,” in Frances Bevan, *Hymns of Ter Steegen, Suso and Others* (London, 1895), p.5.

not yet revealed that the purpose of this trial was to prove conclusively that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). But *we* are distinctly told to have “no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3), and that “those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15). The Lord Himself said that whoever follows Him must “deny *himself*” (Matthew 16:24). So the lesson is clearer for us than it was for Samson. Yet we can speak airily about such things until confronted with some really personal choice and challenge. And then, alas! how often the hollowness of our talk comes out!

Doing God’s work badly

But am I judging Samson’s marriage plan too harshly? For Judges 14:4 says, “But his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD – that he was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines.” But it cannot have been “of the LORD” that in fleshly self-will Samson flout the commandment and sin “presumptuously” (cp. Numbers 15:30-31) by marrying a daughter of the land. And, anyway, why did the LORD have to *seek an occasion* against the Philistines? He had not had to “seek any occasion” against the

Mesopotamians, Moabites, the king of Hazor, the Midianites, or the Ammonites. The very fact of Israel’s oppression by them had been the “occasion”, and the judges whom He raised up had been ready to act! But in this case Israel was comfortable with its oppression, and Samson, the designated deliverer, was oblivious to his commission; so the LORD had to, so to speak, contrive “an occasion”.

And so the Lord brought the lion across Samson’s path, plus the bees, so that Samson dream up his riddle in order to “get one over” his thirty Philistine “best men” (14:5-14). But why did Samson conceal his combat with the lion from his parents? (14:6, 9) The angel had not mentioned Samson’s future strength to them, and killing the lion was probably the first notable demonstration of it. So perhaps he wished to conceal his strength from his parents. Why? Could it have been because, if they learned about it, it might remind them of his calling to save Israel from the Philistines, something he did not wish to be reminded of at that moment?

But if Samson could act in the flesh, so could the thirty; and because of his infatuation with the young idolatress, Samson got the worst of it (14:17-18). This triggered the chain of fleshly action and reaction which led the Philistines to pronounce Samson public enemy number one, and Samson to take refuge in the cleft of the rock of Etam (15:8-9). The LORD had indeed “found an occasion against the Philistines,” little as, it seems, Samson had originally intended it.

*The Lord Himself
said that
whoever follows Him must
“deny himself”*

Etam was evidently in the tribal lands of Judah, and the Philistines sent a large force to Lehi on the Judean border to arrest Samson. The men of Judah were appalled. They had opted for the quiet life, and Samson was a “loose cannon” who was ruining it (15:11). However, Samson let them hand him over to the Philistines, whereupon once more “the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him...” Single-handedly he annihilated the Philistine force deployed against him (15:14-16). But long hair didn’t prevent thirst, and the LORD encouraged Samson to realise that fighting the Philistines was His will for his life by miraculously providing water out of the ground (15:18-19).

Young sinner → old sinner

Evidently the Philistines decided against trying to arrest Samson again, and during this period Samson served as Israel’s tenth expressly-named judge. At the end of twenty years (15:20), Samson showed he was still the man of his youth (16:1). He demonstrated that evil tendencies not judged and overcome in the power of the Spirit earlier in life remain to rise up and overpower us later on. Perhaps he went to the sea-coast town of Gaza in order to be well out of sight of his countrymen. The Philistines saw a chance to assassinate him, but they discovered that even after twenty years his powers were undiminished. Whenever Samson fulfilled his God-given mandate – conflict with the Philistines – he triumphed (16:2-3).

But by now the unjudged habits of a lifetime were irresistible. “Afterwards he loved a woman in the valley of

*Temptations
deliberately sought out
far from home
cannot be resisted
close to home either*

Sorek” (16:4). Unlike Gaza, Sorek was close to home; temptations deliberately sought out far from home cannot be resisted close to home either. His moral weakness leads him straight into the same trap as at the first. As he had given in to the importuning of the young woman of Timnah and told her his riddle, so he told Delilah the secret of his strength. And then he gullibly remained where his hair was vulnerable (16:18-20).

“Nature” teaches us that long hair is a dishonour to a man but a glory to a woman (1 Corinthians 11:14-15; cp. Ezekiel 44:20). By “nature” Paul means moralities that are constants of our human constitution, not shifting cultural norms (cp. Romans 1:26). Therefore the Nazirite’s long hair was a dishonour, or disgrace, to him. Samson had accepted this life-long disgrace. But had he accepted the *reason* for it – separation to the LORD? (Numbers 6:5) His whole life shouts that he had not. How could he consort with Philistine women *and* tell them the reason for his long hair? Are we in relationships where we cannot proclaim “whose we are and whom we serve”? If we persist in them, they will be our downfall, as they were

Samson's. Rather, we should esteem "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Hebrews 11:26).

Samson's eyes, which had so often led him astray, were put out (16:21). He was taken in bronze fetters to the very city where recently his self-will had led him in sin. The willing slave to sin became the miserable slave of the Philistines.

"Out of weakness were made strong"

It's unlikely that Samson had been a praying man. Weakness had once made him pray before – when thirst made him fear death (15:18). Weakness made Samson pray again, but this time, though he prays for revenge as before,² he doesn't pray for his life. Now the man who had used spectacular powers to deliver himself from the Philistines asks to perish with them (16:30). God could have delivered him, but Samson asks Him not to. This was true repentance. He seems to recognise that, in the face of the disgrace which the behaviour of Samson the judge had brought upon God, God's glory required that he share the calamity he was about to wreak on the Philistines. For someone who had been too familiar with Philistines in his life, there was something fitting about

² Revenge and retribution are not for the Christian (Romans 12:19-20), but there is no room here to consider the dispensational change that made calling fire down from heaven right for Elijah but wrong for James and John (2 Kings 1: 10,12; Luke 9:54-56), or how far, even in that dispensation, Samson's calls for vengeance were righteous.

his dying with them as well. Samson's request for death showed him to be truly "born of God"; nothing much else showed it. But, as stated earlier, Samson died in learning the truth that "*Across the will of nature / leads on the path of God.*" This victory over *self*, through prayer (and even though his hair was only *growing*), to a greater victory over the Philistines than all his previous victories put together (16:22, 30).

The lesson, then, from the life of Samson is that we should never try to run our natural wills and God's will in tandem. We tend to be long in learning this lesson. May Samson's example facilitate some accelerated learning! His was an extreme case. But "all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10: 11). Have we too accepted death as to our own wills and old natures? "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God... Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry" (Colossians 3: 3, 5).



Gaza

What the Lord is to His People

I AMs of John's Gospel [3]

Tom Albiston

Have you noticed that the Lord did not say, "I raise the dead," or "I accomplish the resurrection," but "I am the Resurrection"? What did He mean? And how is "resurrection" different from "life"? These are the themes of this short article.

I AM The Resurrection and The Life

In previous studies we have learned that the Lord Jesus Christ is the *Bread* of life, the *Light* of life, the *Door* into life, and the *Power* to preserve life (as "the Good Shepherd"). And in chapters 11 and 12 we learn that He Himself is the character of the life: He says, "I *am* the Resurrection and the Life."

The title, "the Resurrection and the Life," whilst intimately related to the raising of Lazarus in John 11, is to be understood in the light of chapter 12 as well. In these two chapters there is clear testimony given to the Person of Christ, both as to His deity and His humanity. As to His humanity, for example, the Lord *journeys* to Bethany; Mary fell at His *feet*; "Jesus *wept*"; the Jews speak of Him as "this *man*"; He *lifts up His eyes* to heaven; He *eats* with the family at Bethany; He *rides* into Jerusalem; He speaks of His *death*; He is *deeply moved in His spirit*; and He Himself says, "Now is *my soul troubled*" (11:15, 32, 33, 35, 37, 41; 12: 2, 14, 24, 27). The One of whom these things are spoken was truly *man*. "Since by man came death [Adam], by Man came also resurrection of those that are dead" (1 Corinthians 15:21, Darby. Trans.). The Lord does not say, "I raise the dead," or "I accomplish the resurrection," but "I *am* the Resurrection."

The Lord's deity is also stated. Isaiah spoke of His glory (12:40-41). Martha confesses Him to be "the Son of God who should come into the world" (11: 27). The miracle of Lazarus' resurrection brings out the "the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified" (11:4, 40). The glory is displayed in that Person by whose power death is annulled. The Lord had already spoken of resurrection being the result produced by His voice, to which *all* that are in the graves must respond (John 5:28,29). That such power was His is confirmed by the raising up of dead persons, such as Lazarus, during the course of His ministry; and in due season His

*Since by man came death, by Man
came also resurrection of the dead*

own resurrection also gave witness to it (John 2:20-22; cp. Romans 1:4). But the hour is coming when it shall be finally manifested in the resurrection of the just and unjust, when “All that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth...”

What is resurrection? It is victory over death. As Man, the Lord Jesus Christ was able to lay down His life, giving His flesh and His blood as the food and drink of life to all who believe on Him (John 6:53-55). Death had no claim upon Him; He was not in any sense subject to it. In this perfection He stood alone. The glorious meaning of His being the *Resurrection* could only be realized through His *death*. Apart from that He must abide alone, but if He die, much fruit will result (John 12:24). Through the death He suffered He destroyed Him who had power over death, etc. (Hebrews 2:14).

“I am the Resurrection”. The Lord’s resurrection is the proof of accomplished atonement and of complete victory (1 Corinthians 15:14-17, 56, 57). Being *the Resurrection*, though He die, it can only be to rise out of death in triumph. This is the indisputable demonstration of His superiority to all that Satan had brought in through man – even sin and death by sin.

In addition to stating that He is the Resurrection, the Lord Jesus also declares Himself to be “The Life”. Resurrection is being quickened out of death, and ends that state or condition. It also ushers in another and final state or condition – *life*. Resurrection is “unto life” for those who believe (John 5:24-25, 29). “Because I live, ye also shall live” (14:19). “Everyone who lives [having been spiritually quickened] and believes [the basis and principle of continuity in the blessing of eternal life] on Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). This blessed Person, God’s Son, submitted to manhood and death for God’s glory, and for the blessing of others. As “the Resurrection” He brings the end of death for believers. He brings them into an entirely new position, involving in due course their conformity to His image. And now this same blessed Person is also “the Life” of His people. “Resurrection” and “life” in *believers* find their illustration in the two commands by which the Lord effected His great sign. First, “Lazarus, come forth” (11:43) – the command to resurrection out of death; secondly, “Loose him, and let him go” (11:44) – the command to life in full freedom from all the bands of death. This leads to the happy feast of John 12:1-3, a significant illustration of fellowship in new life, even the fellowship of the Son of God.

... *that the Son of God may be glorified*

A Quick Glance at some Short Papers!

Yannick Ford

Unsatisfactory views about the church are prevalent in our time – unsurprisingly, in view of its chaotic condition, but to everyone’s loss. This article arose partly out of a discussion group which used Hamilton Smith’s recently re-issued Short Papers on the Church (Scripture Truth Publications, 2008) as its basis. An idea others could adopt?

“The church” – a big yawn?

Let’s be honest, church truth and dispensational truth are not always easy for younger Christians to pick up. There isn’t a special section in the Bible where these are outlined in the way we might expect in textbooks today. Instead, God has a much better plan in His Word, and these truths are learnt as we read and study the various epistles of the New Testament. As a child, I would pick up certain truths here, others there, as I listened to Bible teachers; and over the years I obtained my understanding of church and dispensational truth.

It is important that we *do* learn and teach these truths today. This article is about a book that explains them, so I’ll start with a quote from it:

“The church is Christ’s chief interest on earth – the subject of all God’s present dealings. During the period between the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the coming of Christ at the rapture God is not dealing directly with the world [John 17:9 – ed.], whether Jew or Gentile; He is taking a people out of the world to form the church for heaven.”

If it is true that the church is Christ’s chief interest on earth – and I believe that it is – then it is important that we understand what the church is.

The book I have just quoted from is Hamilton Smith’s *Short Papers on the Church*.¹ At our local assembly we discussed one of its chapters each week in a discussion group.

Christ loved the church

In the first session we looked at chapter 1, “The church prophetically announced”; and my quote above comes from this chapter (p.5). The first point that particularly struck me as I read it was that *Christ loves His church* – “Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*” (Ephesians 5:25, NKJV). This led me to ask myself and the others, “Is this something that we think about, or do we think mostly of Christ’s love for individual believers?” And, “How should this influence our thoughts about the church?”

¹ Full reference at head of article

Christ revealed the church

Hamilton Smith goes on to say that knowledge of the church was given by revelation. The Lord told Peter that it was God the Father who gave him his understanding that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God”: “Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:16,17). A proper understanding of who the Lord Jesus is constitutes the foundation of the church. And so the Lord Himself then reveals something to Peter: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (16:18).

The Lord Jesus said, “My church”. We are reminded that it is *His* church, and that He loves her. I once heard on the radio a comment that went a bit like this: “The kind of Church that I want to see is...” The above points show us that such an approach cannot be right.

The destiny of the church is heaven. As Hamilton Smith says, “Although fashioned in time, Christ’s church is destined for eternity, and though built on earth it will be displayed in heaven” (pp. 12-13). We are told in Colossians, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-4).

Hamilton Smith commented that the “assembly [i.e., the church] is not a meeting of young people, or of old saints, or like-minded people, but a people who are drawn together by what they have discovered in Christ as set forth in His Name. The assembly has no other bond, refuses all other bonds, and, gathering together thus, the Lord promises to be in the midst, even if it be but two or three who are thus gathered” (p. 14).

God’s resources for the church

Moving on to chapter 2, we majored on God’s resources for us so that we can continue in unity and in His purposes. These resources are summarised in Acts 2:42: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Discussing these things led to a lot of practical questions, such as, “Why do we think that the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship are mentioned together? Is there a practical lesson we can gain from this?” “How can we ensure that we ‘continue steadfastly’ in the apostles’ teaching?”

Knowledge of the church was given by revelation

The future earthly glory of Christ was no mystery

Clearly, the breaking of bread is an important matter. It is interesting to note that although Paul would have known about the breaking of bread from the other apostles, the Lord Himself chose to speak to Paul directly about this matter (1 Corinthians 11:23).

God's counsels and the church

The third session was based on chapter 3, "The church in the counsels of God." A key comment is this – "Unless we know [God's] purposes for eternity, we shall not understand His ways in time" (p.27). The Bible passage was Ephesians 1:1 – 2:10. We began to see God's plans and thoughts for the church, and for Christ. We stepped back before time to see God's purposes in eternity, and we stepped forward to see the heavenly destiny of the church as she reigns with Christ. In our day-to-day lives, we are much more likely to do a good job if we know how our task fits in to the big picture! Thus, God has graciously given us His plans in His Word, and we will be greatly encouraged as we study them.

In Ephesians 1:9, we read about the *mystery of God's will*, and this centres upon *God's purposes for Christ*. Hamilton Smith points out that in the Bible, a *mystery* is a secret that cannot be known until it is revealed by God. He also helpfully explains that the future *earthly* glory of the Christ (Messiah) was no mystery, because this was foretold in the Old Testament. However, *the dominion of Christ over heaven and earth* (Ephesians 1:10), and *the association of the church* with Christ in His glory (for instance, see Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:32) is indeed a tremendous mystery that God has now revealed to us.

Chapter 4 of Hamilton Smith's book concerned "The church in the ways of God." This chapter gave me what was probably the most thought-provoking comment:

"For let us remember that the church is not only "one body", but it is "His body", as we read, "the Church which is His body". And as His body it is "the fulness of Him." It is filled with all that He is in order to express all that He is. The church – His body – is to be the expression of His mind, just as our bodies give expression to what is in our minds." (p. 43)

Still in Ephesians, we considered "The church as administered by Paul," in chapter 3. Here we studied how Paul was specially commissioned to explain and announce this great *mystery* of the church. As I read Ephesians 3, and then Hamilton Smith's notes, the main point that struck me was that the amazing plans and counsel of God are now being displayed in the church. "It is wonderful how slow Christians are to understand the largeness of the counsels of God. ... In general we are obliged to be much more occupied with the details of the Christian life than with the great

principles of this life” (anonymous quote, p. 47). This was a thought provoking statement. Am I entering into the “largeness of the counsels of God”, or am I pretty much focused on the details of my own life?

The church as God’s house

In chapter 6 Hamilton Smith introduced a different picture – the church as the house of God. God dwells in His house, and in the current dispensation His house is the church. Why does He dwell in it? Hamilton Smith answers as follows: “What, then, is the great purpose that God has at heart in dwelling amongst men? First, if God has a dwelling-place among men it is in order that God may be known in blessing to men. Second, if man is blessed it is in order that God may be praised. These are the two great ends purposed in connection with the house of God: God made known to man in blessing, that man may turn to God in praise” (p. 59).

We sometimes hear the phrase “house rules”. God will expect certain types of behaviour in His house. This is clearly expressed in Paul’s first letter to Timothy: “but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). This passage tells us directly that the church is the house of God, and it also tells us that there is expected behaviour. Thus, much of the first epistle to Timothy outlines what this expected behaviour is. It is interesting to read the whole of 1 Timothy, followed by all of 1 Peter – you will notice several parallels.

We did not study chapter 7 – “The church as the house of God in the hands of men” – but this is an important aspect. The contrast is always there between what God has planned and set up, and what we, in our responsibility, have done.

Christ displayed through the church

Chapter 8 returns to the subject of the church as the body of Christ, and connects to the topic of the counsels of God in chapter 3. The last full paragraph on page 72 of Hamilton Smith’s book was a key point for me:

“The manifestations of the Spirit through the body have in view the display of Christ in the body in time; and the display of Christ now is but the prelude to the setting forth of Christ in His fulness in the ages to come according to the counsels of the Father.”

*However, the association of the church
with Christ in His glory
is a mystery that God has now revealed to us*

*The church is filled with all that Christ is
in order to express all that He is*

This is not the easiest of sentences on first reading, but what impressed me was the fact that *we display Christ here in this world, and that we will display Him in eternity too*. The quote continues,

“Thus God’s present thought for the body – composed of all saints at any given moment on the earth – is that therein there should be the setting forth of Christ morally, and thus the body on earth correspond to the Head in heaven... If we are to display the moral beauties of Christ we must know Christ. We must know the One whose character we are to set forth. The opinions of men, the philosophy of man, the religion of the flesh, and the superstitions of men will neither teach us anything of the character of Christ nor enable us to set forth that character when known.” (pp.75-76)

This led me to think about our closeness to Christ and the importance of really knowing Him, and also about our closeness to each other, since we all form part of His body, Christ being the Head.

Spiritual gifts, particularly as set out in 1 Corinthians 12, were discussed in chapter 9. I feel that it is very important to have a proper understanding of gifts, so we can bring glory to the Lord, be a blessing to others, and be fulfilled in our Christian lives. There are two errors to avoid:

- (1) if one man in a local church does *everything*, he will be doing certain activities that he is not gifted for, and others will perhaps never properly use their gift.
- (2) we can fall into the opposite error and expect *everyone to do everything*. Both could be a danger in a small local assembly. We need to do what the Lord has appointed us to do.

This chapter is very readable. An important point in it is as follows:

“For, according to God’s order, the Spirit does not use us as isolated individuals, but as members of the body of Christ, and for the good of the whole body.” (p.84)

Our gifts are to be used for the benefit of others, so as to exalt the Lord – not for our own exaltation.

The church – still practicable?

The final chapter of Hamilton Smith’s book deals with the church in a day of failure, based on a study of 2 Timothy chapter 2. By considering all the above subjects, we gained a good understanding of the church according to the Bible. But if we are

honest, as we look around at Christianity in general today, what we see does not really correspond to what we learn from the Bible. The biggest issue is the fact that we are separated into many different “churches”, whereas we have seen that there is only *one* church, the body of Christ. We know that wrong teachings, contrary to the Bible, do circulate. In our own history as “brethren” we are painfully aware of many divisions and unhappiness. So what do we do?

Hamilton Smith writes that we have three great provisions (p. 90):

- Christ, our Head, is in heaven and He will give wisdom.
- The Holy Spirit dwells in us and He will guide.
- We have the Scriptures that do not change and that are authoritative.

Based on this, I had the following thoughts:

- We should seek to follow, as closely as possible, the truths that we learn from the Scriptures.
- In 2 Timothy 1:15 Paul says, “This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.” This is an incredible statement, given that the apostle Paul was the one who brought the gospel to the Gentiles, taught about the church, and revealed the mystery. It confirms that Christianity in general had even then become “a great house [in which] are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honour and some for dishonour” (2 Timothy 2:20).
- 2 Timothy 2 speaks of separation from evil teaching and from evil teachers, and this is also brought out in Hamilton Smith’s final chapter. Sadly, we know that there have been many shameful and probably unnecessary divisions among Christians and in our own “brethren” history, and so we need to be very careful when we consider the subject of separation. Nevertheless the principle is true, that we cannot associate with that which is plainly wrong. However, let us be encouraged with what we have, and let us check what we do against what the Bible teaches.
- Let’s not forget that the Lord Jesus speaks to the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. It is likely that these seven churches represent the various possible conditions of churches during our current dispensation. Therefore we should find guidance within these seven letters for ourselves, and our situation.

I highly recommend *Short Papers on the Church* as a help to understanding the Bible’s teachings about the church. The chapters are relatively short, and mostly pretty readable. Helpful and sound authors like Hamilton Smith were and are a gift to the church, and we can still benefit from this gift today.

Creation teaching throughout the Old Testament

What does the Bible teach about creation? Part 4

David Anderson

Creation underpins the whole of Bible truth. Having first outlined the New-Testament teaching about creation, and then returned to the creation narrative and its aftermath in Genesis (see *Scripture Truth*, January & October 2010 and January 2011), the writer now offers an overview of the fulness of testimony to God as Creator in the rest of the Old Testament. Some idea of this fulness is conveyed by the wealth of OT references given in the article. Look them up, and you too will say, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth”! (Psalm 8:1, ESV)

Introduction

Old Testament writers constantly hark back to the Creation and in doing so reveal interesting additional information about God and how He created. What they write enhances our appreciation of the Creator. God Himself confronted Job with these very things. In Job 38-41 three main attributes of God, as demonstrated in creation, stand out:

- By His perfect wisdom God knew *what* to create to bring glory to Himself and blessing to the masterpiece of His creation – man.
- By His perfect understanding God knew *how* to create everything.
- By His perfect power as the Almighty God He had the intrinsic *capability* to create what He had planned.

By God’s wisdom

“The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens” (Proverbs 3:19).

My wife often says that one of the blessings of ministering the gospel to very young children is that they already know within their hearts that God exists. Yes, all people know intuitively that there is a God (cp. Ecclesiastes 3:11), although many are in denial of this truth (cp. Romans 1:20-22). The very best that present-day non-Christian intellectuals will admit is that He is the Intelligent Designer. But God is more than that! Sagacious Solomon, with his God-given understanding of

*By His perfect wisdom God knew what to create
By His perfect understanding God knew how to create
By His perfect power God had the capability to create*

*He made the earth by His power,
established the world by His wisdom, and by
His understanding stretched out the heavens*



the natural world (cp. 1 Kings 4:29-34) declares in the proverb given at the start of this section that God used His infinite wisdom (knowing *what* was required) and understanding (knowing *how* to do it) to design and to make the universe. David also appreciated this when he viewed its vastness (Psalm 8:1 & 3), and again when he pondered the complexities of his own being (Psalm 139:13-18). With modern technological advances, we now know much more about the hugeness of the cosmos, as well as about the intricacies of the smallest of created things, such as the “simple” cell¹ of a living organism. These complexities of the creation, and of life itself, only reinforce in us (believers) what David felt about these things, and convince us of the supreme wisdom of our Creator.

In Proverbs 8:22-31, Wisdom is personified and calls Himself the “master craftsman” (v.30). This is an apposite description for the Creator, because in all the works of God, the Son does exactly what the Father shows Him (cp. John 5:19-20). But Colossians 1:16 specifically attributes creation to the Son – “for by [or, in] Him all things were created”, where the word “in” implies the wisdom, as well as the power, to create.

By God’s power and wisdom

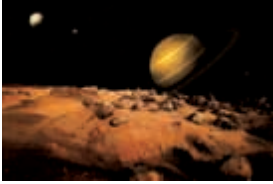
“But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King... It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding stretched out the heavens” (Jeremiah 10:10, 12; similarly 51:15).

These verses assert that the power of God (i.e., His ability to create) is commensurate with His wisdom. Paul clearly states this in Romans 1:20: “For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So [the whole of mankind is] without excuse”. Christians know that Christ is both the *power* and the *wisdom* of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). J.G. Deck’s hymn to the “Lamb of God” aptly states,

“Thy almighty power and wisdom
all creation’s works proclaim:
heaven and earth alike confess Thee
as the ever great I AM.”²

¹ By using electron microscopes, scientists have discovered the ‘simple’ cell to be as complex as a fully-functioning factory!

² James G. Deck, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London, Broom & Rouse, 1889), p.1.



*Ah, Lord GOD!
Nothing is too hard for You*

Scriptural anthropomorphism

“Anthropomorphism” is much used throughout Scripture. This is the practice of attributing human action (or form) to God, and it is often used to aid our understanding of God’s creative activities. For example, in Genesis 2:7, “the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” This explains how God made Adam and, in an intimate way, made him unique amongst all creatures (cp.1:27). Isaiah 29:16 & 64:8 even describe God as the Potter and man the clay that He moulds and uses to accomplish His sovereign will (cp. Romans 9:19-24). However, in reality God is spirit – He is without form or shape. We know from the repetitive phrase, “And God said,”³ that God simply spoke the whole creation into being; but we have already seen the other “anthropomorphism” of God making the universe as a craftsman makes an object. Hence other scriptures develop this picture and elaborate on how God “laid the foundations of the earth,” “established the earth/heavens/world”, and “stretched out the heavens”; and they speak about the work of His outstretched arm, of His hands, of His fingers, and so on.

Laying the foundations and establishing the earth

“Of old You laid the foundation of the earth” (Psalm 102:25).⁴

“Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You have established the earth, and it stands fast” (Psalm 119:90).

Like any builder, God started with the foundations of the world,⁴ and then built up from this core. These foundations were laid on Day One of creation (Genesis 1:1-5), and this was the first creative act of God. Correspondingly, the expressions “from the foundation(s) of the earth / world”⁵ and “before the foundation of the world”⁶ are used in Scripture to indicate the very earliest points in time.

Having laid the foundation on Day One, God built up the earth on Day Three. He established (prepared, made ready, perfected) it for habitation by the animals, but more especially, by mankind (Isaiah 45:18).⁷ He did this by “spreading out the

³ Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26 and confirmed by Psalm 33:6 & 9; 148:5, with Hebrews 11:3.

⁴ Other references: Proverbs 8:29; Isaiah 48:13 & 51:13, 16; Job 38:4.

⁵ Isaiah 40:21; Matthew 13:35 & 25:34; Luke 11:50; Hebrews 4:3 & 9:26; Revelation 13:8 & 17:8.

⁶ John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20.

⁷ Other references: 1 Chronicles 16:30; Proverbs 30:4; Jeremiah 10:12 & 51:15.

earth above the waters” (Psalm 136:6). He also filled the earth with plants and vegetation, “spread[ing] out the earth and what comes from it” (Isaiah 42:5).

God’s outstretched arm, His hands and His fingers

“Ah, Lord GOD! It is You who have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for You” (Jeremiah 32:17).

“It was My hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host” (Isaiah 45:12).

“Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place” (Psalm 8:3).

God’s “outstretched arm” is a frequently-used Old Testament anthropomorphism to describe God’s almighty creatorial power – as in the first quotation (and in Jeremiah 27:5) – but now also at work in His redemption, protection, and judgment of Israel.⁸ The recurrent expression, “He stretched out the heavens”⁹ explains how He took the heavens He had made on Day One (Genesis 1:1) and established them for mankind (Proverbs 3:19; Proverbs 8:27). On Day Four, the day when He “made the stars also” (Genesis 1:16. KJV), God stretched out the cosmos as we would do with curtains (Psalm 104:2 & Isaiah 40:22). We noted previously that God used His own understanding and almighty power (Jeremiah 51:15) to give us our universe, whose vast distances scientists can only measure in terms of light years. He is the Almighty who acted alone and unaided (Isaiah 44:24). In Isaiah 48:13 God says this was the work of His *right hand* and thus emphasizes His power.

Genesis 1:17 states that on Day Four of creation God set the solar system (the sun, the moon and the planets) and the galaxies in position to give light to the earth. God carefully and accurately placed them in outer space as a skilled constructor would use his fingers for the more intricate positioning of his model. The result is that the sun is in exactly the correct position to sustain life on earth.¹⁰ When David



*It was My hands that
stretched out the heavens,
and I commanded all their host*

⁸ Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 4:34, 5:15, 7:19, 9:29, 11:2, 26:8; 1 Kings 8:42; 2 Kings 17:36; 2 Chronicles 6:32; Psalm 136:12; Jeremiah 32:21; Ezekiel 20:33-34.

⁹ Job 9:8; Isaiah 40:22, 42:5, 44:24, 45:12, 51:13; Jeremiah 10:12, 51:15; Zechariah 12:1.

¹⁰ This is an example of the “anthropic principle”, i.e., that so many features of the universe, if they were only a tiny bit different from what they are, would make life, especially human life, on earth impossible.



*Great is our Lord,
and abundant in power*

says in Psalm 8:3 that the stars were also the work of God’s fingers, he indicates that the stretching out of the heavens was a controlled event, not an explosion, not a “Big Bang”! God’s control over the entire universe is such that “He hangs the earth on nothing” (Job 26:7).


“He determines the number of the stars; He gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure” (Psalm 147:4-5, ESV). Stuart Burgess gives as the scientific estimate of the number of stars in the universe at least 50 billion billion.¹¹ The actual number is indeterminate by man (Genesis 15:5). But at creation, God both assigned the actual number of stars and individually named each one of them! “He...brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power not one is missing” (Isaiah 40:26). These names are not revealed to us. In Scripture God uses names that mankind recognises, such as Pleiades, Orion, the Mazzaroth and the Great Bear (Job 38:31-32). Each star has a specific purpose in creation “for star differs from star in glory” (1 Corinthians 15:41).

The beauty of the universe

“By his Spirit the heavens are adorned” (Job 26:13, Darby Trans.).

God has given the universe grandeur and exquisite beauty, the glory of which bears constant witness to Him (Psalm 19:1-4). This “Song of Creation” has been, and will be, proclaimed to the whole of mankind (and in understandable terms!) throughout all the ages of the history of the world. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (ESV). Amen! Many Old-Testament writers exude appreciation of the glory of God’s creation seen both on earth and in heaven. It is appropriate to finish with praise from one of them, David the psalmist.

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set Your glory above the heavens” (Psalm 8:1).



*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above
proclaims his handiwork*

¹¹ Stuart Burgess, *He Made the Stars Also* (Leominster, Day One Publications 2001), p. 81.

Psalm 115: Exhortation praise

John Weston

How many dead idols can you think of? All that mankind produces is essentially dead, however useful in some cases. We can respect human achievements without worshipping them, or being intimidated by them. Psalm 115 triumphantly answers the Gentiles' taunt, "Where is now their God?" This article is part of a series on the "hallel psalms" (113-118) that commenced last October.

"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake" (Psalm 115:1, KJV).

"Ecstatic salvation" is the overall title that one rabbi gives to these "hallel psalms". This rabbi also points out that spiritual salvation is not just being saved, in the sense of being rescued from drowning or escaping from a burning building. It is far more than that. "Yeshuah", the Hebrew word for salvation, implies not only being rescued, but being transformed as well.

Surely this is just what we mean when we speak of someone being "saved". "Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As Passover is celebrated, the mighty power of God is proclaimed. Israel had been rescued from slavery, dramatically saved, and then transformed into a nation under God, in striking contrast to the surrounding nations, where idol worship was the norm. This is the emphasis of Psalm 115, and we too can rejoice that we are kept by the power of God and have been freed from the domination of sin.

Looking at this psalm, we have a wonderful opening prayer (v.1), the power of God compared to the futility of idol worship (vv.2-8), and then the closing call for praise (vv.9-18).

The prayer

"Not unto us O LORD." Surely this opening prayer is one that is constantly on the lips of each believer. "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Our complete deliverance we owe to the Blessed One, whose Name of JESUS. The angel announced to Joseph, "For He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Of Him the apostle John said, "The blood of Jesus Christ, [God's] Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased

It is most interesting that during the Passover celebration Psalm 115 is chanted immediately after drinking the third cup of wine – the cup of blessing – the very one that our Lord indicated was to symbolise the shedding of His blood. Surely, we too, at this very same juncture in our “breaking of bread” service, will re-echo this opening prayer of the psalm.

The peremptory dismissal (vv. 2-8)

A rabbi also describes this psalm as like a pause in the sequence of hallel psalms. Against the sneers of the heathen (v.2) it peremptorily dismisses the gods that human beings fashion with their own hands. These inert idols are entirely at the whim of those who make them, but Jehovah, the living God, is sovereign: “He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased” (v.3).

“Once they bade his Son come down from the cross and they would believe in him; now they would have God overstep the ordinary bounds of his providence and come down from heaven to convince them: but other matters occupy his august mind besides the convincement of those who wilfully shut their eyes to the superabundant evidences of His divine power and Godhead... If our God is neither seen nor heard... yet is he none the less real and true, for he is where his adversaries can never be – in the heavens.”¹

Yet in the psalmist’s taunts we can hear Elijah challenging the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:21-39). Having exposed the utter futility of Baal-worship, he calls upon his God to demonstrate His power. How ludicrous to place any dependence upon idols! They cannot speak, see, hear. They are utterly useless in every way.

Theodoret tells us of a certain St Publia (c. 370 A.D.), aged abbess of Antioch, who was chanting the words of this psalm along with her company of nuns as the apostate emperor Julian went by in idolatrous procession. “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands... They that make them are like unto

*How ludicrous to place any dependence upon idols!
They cannot speak, see, hear.*

¹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David* (London, 7 vols., c. 1870-1886), vol. 5, p.265.

them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (vv.4,8). He narrates how the angry emperor caused his soldiers to buffet her until she bled. He could not endure the sting of this ancient Hebrew song. Truly our God is in the heavens from where He stretches forth His sceptre and rules with boundless power.

What a blessed assurance we have, as do all those whose trust in the living God. I can almost hear the apostle Peter now, standing, as he did, in the very spot where worship was made to the god Pan, and giving answer to our Lord’s question, “Whom say ye that I am?” “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the *living* God”! (Matthew 16:15-16) Indeed He is our help and our shield (Psalm 115:10), and the psalmist gives a wide sweep of His blessings, from universal to national to individual (vv.9-18).

J.B.Phillips once wrote a book entitled *Your God is too small*. We are continually in danger of measuring the power of God by human standards. I remember, in my youth, forever blowing the bulb in my bike’s headlamp. When I complained to the cycle-shop owner, he gave me a bulb and said, “Go on, just try and blow this one!” Try as I could, and as fast as I could go, I never blew it. Never place a limit on the power of God; go in faith, a faith that can move mountains. Just lean on those everlasting arms. With God all things are possible. He is the God of the impossible. “*Ye are blessed of the Lord, which made heaven and earth*” (Psalm 115:15).

The praise

“Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth me” (Psalm 50:23) – a maxim that should always be in the forefront of our thinking. Time and again, in both Old and New Testaments, we are reminded of the power of praise.

Hymnbooks abound, and many books have been written on the subject of praise – but it is to the individual believer that the challenge comes. Fanny Crosby, the blind poetess, could testify to the fact that she was “praising my Saviour, all the day long.” (However I remember a dear brother who could never sing these words in all honesty, and always inserted the word ‘sometimes’ when singing them!)

Psalm 115 found its true meaning, as did other hallel psalms, when it was sung in the Upper Room. Within hours, the great veil of the temple was to be torn

*Never place a limit on the power of God.
Just lean on those everlasting arms.*

down, and the way into the Holiest was to be opened up. A new priesthood was to emerge, entering in with songs of worship and praise.

Our theme of praise art Thou alone,
Thy cross, Thy work, Thy word;
Oh! Who can fathom all Thy love,
Thou living blessed Lord?²

“Be not drunk with wine... but be filled with the Holy Spirit,” said Paul to the believers in Ephesus (5:18). It is by the filling of the Holy Spirit that our tongues are loosed, and from the very centre of our being praise spontaneously springs forth.

The hymn book is our aid to worship. A young Christian was in hospital. Asking for a book and her Bible to read, she was refused. “Then may I have my hymn book?” “Yes,” was the answer, “Let her have it; no one reads a hymn book.” Little did the doctor know his young patient. When she left the hospital, she knew the hymn book almost by heart. Those of us who remember her in later life can vouch for the fact that she was always singing these lovely hymns.

The great revivals of the last 150 years have been dominated by praise, and it is the praise that has long outlasted the sermons. Still today the hymn, “How Great Thou art!” is high on the praise agenda, the hymn, “Just as I am,” continues to have a profound effect, and the hymns of the Welsh revival remain a blessing.

This is not in any way to decry the preaching of sermons, for “How shall they hear without a preacher?” and, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:14, 17). Preaching is essential, and thousands were born again through the preaching of Moody, Torrey and Graham – but, with the passing of the years, it is the hymns sung by Sankey, Alexander and Shea that continue to uplift and provide a channel of praise and worship.

“Though the dead cannot, and the wicked will not, and the careless do not praise God, yet we will shout ‘Hallelujah’ for ever and ever. Amen.”³ So Spurgeon concludes his exposition of this psalm.

*Preaching is essential
but it is the hymns sung that continue to uplift*

² T.E.Purdom, c. 1852 - 1942

³ Spurgeon, *Treasury*, vol. 5, p.270.

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“The disciple whom Jesus loved”

The fish drowns not in the mighty sea,
the bird sinks not in the air,
the gold in the furnace fire may be,
and yet is more radiant there.
For God to each of His creatures gave
the place to its nature known:
and shall it not be that my heart should crave
for that which is mine own?
For my nature seeketh her dwelling place,
that only, and none other;
the child must joy in the father's face,
the brethren in the brother;
to the heart of the bridegroom goeth the bride,
for love is her home and rest:

And shall not I in His light abide
when I lean upon His breast?

**Mechthild of Hellfde [13th century],
trans. Emma Frances Bevan. Slightly altered.**

From *Hymns of Ter Steegen, Suso and Others, 2nd Series* (New edition, Hong Kong), p.18.