

# Scripture Truth



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Celebrating the Lord's Supper

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# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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## Creation ethics

A participant at a recent Christian men's convention made a telling observation. He said (so it was reported to me) that when he had been saved in the 1970s many people had expressed a sort of admiration. They wished they had his faith. They admired the moral standards by which he intended to live. But by the 1990s his confession of Christ met with bare tolerance. If it's right for you and works for you, go for it. But that doesn't make it right for us. And by the 2010s the reaction is unambiguously negative. He is reproached for the backward, inferior morality of Christianity.

People nowadays vehemently reject a morality that calls things "right" just because God said them. They regard this as tyrannous, rather than as something designed to promote wellbeing. They demand an ethic whose core is pleasing themselves, subject to this not adversely impinging on other people. (Their idea of not adversely affecting others is, however, a narrow one that ignores cruel indirect effects, especially on children.) Ever since the Fall people have sought to live their lives away from God, and since the Flood their darkened minds have terrorised themselves with cruel, capricious divinities. But not until recently have they felt able to despise the creatorial claims of God and claim the high ground for a morality that contradicts His creatorial order. "They... became vain in their reasonings and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21-22, RV). In this, they only too readily followed the impulses of "the god of this age" who "hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them" (2 Corinthians 4:4, RV).

Therefore we need to be assured of the Bible's witness to the Creatorship of God. Firm faith that "all [God's] work is done in faithfulness... the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD" (Psalm 33:4-5) needs to determine our standards of right and wrong. This issue of the magazine includes the final instalment of David Anderson's valuable series on this witness throughout both Testaments. It has been good that a magazine called *Scripture Truth* could publish such a series. God willing, it will shortly appear as a book.

THEO BALDERSTON

# God's Ideal for You and Me

James Green

*God's purpose is conform us to His image and likeness, something Adam never fully was, nor ever fully could be. But we can be this only in Christ. This article was published exactly a century ago in Scripture Truth. Only a few months later a war would start in which various quite commonplace characteristics of fallen man would cause untold misery to humanity.*

God sets before us His intention for us in time and eternity; and a proper contemplation of it must have a true effect upon us.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Suppose a lad has an artistic temperament; what would be the best way to develop it? To set him to draw straight lines and curves would doubtless be a very useful exercise, but a very wearisome one. I should not start his education in that way, but should take him to one of the best galleries, and set him before a painting by some great master, point out the excellency of its proportion and colouring, and tell him to study that. Do I think that the lad would then be able to go home and make a copy of it? No, but his taste would be formed by the object he has seen; he would have before him something that is far above him. And having the ideal in his mind, his mind would be developed in that direction.

Now God desires to set before everyone of us a right ideal. You find men of the world setting an ideal before them; and how they work to reach it, whether it be fame or money or advancement in knowledge! But Christians ought to have God's ideal before them, an ideal which is sure of realization. In Genesis 1:26-28 you see at the beginning what was in God's mind about man, and this not subject to any change. What God starts with is what He is going to finish with. Things committed to men break down, but not so with God. God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (KJV) and let them have dominion over everything. The New Testament is the working out of this thought unto completion.

## Adam, image and likeness

God had it in His mind before the world was made to create man, and to have him wholly like Himself, and representative of Him. That is God's conception, but it was not to be accomplished in the first man who was made of dust. Let us look at the failure first of all. If God can just demonstrate to you and me that everything has failed on our side, that will put all our pride to one side, and leave us ready listeners as He tells us of His own purpose and how He will effectuate it.

Between the first and fifth chapters of Genesis sin had intruded into the fair creation of God. Man had fallen a ready prey to the adversary, so that he no longer answered to the purpose for which he was made.

Now in what way was Adam made in the likeness of God? Simply in this, that there was no evil in him. He had no knowledge of good and evil. You could not say that Adam was holy, because holiness supposes a nature that, knowing good and evil, loves good and abhors evil. God is holy: dwelling in His own spotless light He is holy. Adam had no knowledge of evil, therefore he was innocent, not holy. But there was no trace of sin in him. In that way he was like God.

But if that is “likeness”, what is the meaning of Adam being made in the “image” of God? The idea conveyed by “image” is *that which represents*. When a question was raised about the tribute money, the Lord Jesus said, “Whose is this image and superscription?” The head on the coin may or may not have been *like* Caesar, but it *represented* him. Adam was set in a place which no angel ever had. He was made the centre of a created sphere to represent God to the creation around him. Nevertheless, in its full meaning image is the *intensification* of likeness, just as I might say of a picture, “That is the very image of my mother. I seem to see her – it is so like her.”

Now we will see how this works out.

Adam fell. He ceased to be like God, because evil was there; but he did not cease to hold his position as the image of God. Man is still the highest being in the created sphere of which he is the centre. The animal creation is still under his dominion; and to that creation he is as God. In Genesis 9:2, God says to Noah, “The fear and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth ... and upon all the



*Adam ... was  
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of a created  
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to the creation  
around him*



*Man is still the  
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the created  
sphere of which  
he is the centre*



fishes of the sea.” Man still retains the image of God in respect of his order in creation; and to slay him is to deface God's image (Genesis 9:6). But as to the likeness? Adam begot a son “in his own likeness” (5:3), in the same condition of sin as he was in himself; and the whole of the Old-Testament history is the development, not of the likeness of God, but of the likeness of fallen man.

The moral character that belongs to all of Adam's race is that of the old man which corrupts itself according to the deceitful lusts (Ephesians 4:22, Darby Trans.). But then Adam was not the fulfilment of God's ideal. God had another Man in reserve whom Adam foreshadowed. God always had this Man had before Him from before the foundation of the world, for His eternal purpose was always connected with the Lord Jesus Christ. When all the present order has passed away, that purpose of God will stand; He will finish with the purpose He began with.

In Colossians the Lord Jesus is spoken of as the image of the invisible God (1:15). He is the one who perfectly represents God. To see Him is to see God. To understand the thoughts of His heart is to come to the knowledge of God. To see Him forgiving sins is to know that God forgives sins. And He is the Firstborn of all creation (1:15); that is, the Pre-eminent One, to whom all dignity and honour in creation belongs, the one whom God has appointed as the head and centre of everything. However Christ is not actually said to *be* the likeness of God, and for the very good reason that *He is God*. God has been pleased to manifest Himself in Him. That great secret lies at the bottom of everything, the secret of the godliness that will claim a man for God, that will make a man yield himself wholly to God. What is that secret? “God was manifest in flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16, KJV). Let that get into your heart, and let your prayer be, “Lord, just show me the wonder of it more, that God was manifest in Thee.”

### Image and likeness in new creation

But to return again to Adam. You notice in those early chapters of Genesis that Adam was not alone. However there were not two centres made. Adam was the centre, but he was not alone. In the whole creation there was not found a helpmeet for him, and so God formed a companion for him, not out of the dust of the earth, and not selected from the animal creation, but out of Adam himself (Genesis 2:18-23). She was the one who was to be his glory and share the place that God had given him, but she was part of himself.

And the great thought of God is that Christ shall not be alone. In Romans 8:29 we read, “Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many

brethren.” But not until Ephesians do we find this fully explained. What God proposes there is not that there should be made so many imitations of Christ, but that there should be a body formed out of Him, as Eve out of Adam, brought by the Holy Spirit into union with Him, and that His life should be expressed through every member of it. Eve’s was not a different life from Adam’s. She was formed out of him - although the figure fails to capture the whole, for there is no figure in the Old Testament at all of the wonderful secret (or “mystery,” see Ephesians 3:4-9) that Christ is the Head of His body. The “type” of husband and wife tells of the love that Christ has to the church and of its subjection to Him, but does not express the full thought of the purpose of God. His purpose is that by forming us into one Body He will conform His saints to the image of His Son, because the life of the Head flows through them in the power of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:12-16).

How did the apostle seek to bring home the knowledge of all this to the saints? After he had unfolded the wonder of God’s previously unrevealed thought regarding the one Body (Ephesians 3:1-13), Paul gave himself to prayer for them (vv.14-21) – *and we have to learn it on our knees too*. If our meeting tonight brings more before us the marvellous, transcendent thought, that God has *this* in His heart, it will result in our being brought to our knees to say, “Lord, teach me. Lord, bring me down low enough that I may learn it (cp.3:8). Lord, open my eyes that I may see it” (cp. vv. 18-19), and that will produce a wonderful effect.

### Putting on the new man

Now just see how it works out in our lives. Ephesians has more to do with the *likeness* of God, Colossians with the *image*. Look at Ephesians 4:22, which should read, “Having put off concerning the former conversation the old man which corrupts itself according to the deceitful lusts” (cp. Darby Trans.). Christ, by His death, has brought to pass before God your severance and mine from the old man. You want to get your foot right down upon that! The thing has been done for God. The old man has been put off so far as God sees it, and all that you and I have to do is to stand upon the place of victory that the Lord Jesus has wrought for us. We have not to gain the victory. We could not do it if we tried. The old man is far too strong for us. Christ has done it, and we have only to claim the victory, and, although the flesh still remains in us, to refuse to allow its working to give character to our lives.

What is the old man? It is the character of Adam fallen. That moral likeness in which Adam begot his son, and which has been developed in his descendants, that is the old man. What is the new man? That new moral character which has

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come to light in Christ. The Lord Jesus personally is not actually spoken of as the new Man because in Him there never was anything else, but His character in us is the new man, because in us there has been something else. Notice chapter 4: 23, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (KJV). Why is that put in there? Because God wants you to get His thought before you. He wants His ideal in Christ to fill your soul. You look at Him, and as you see His moral beauty, and as you realize that God has made that life yours, that Christ is your life, you will be renewed in the spirit of your mind. You will gladly take up the thought that God has connected you with Him by the Holy Spirit, and has put on you the new man, that new moral character that, after God, is created in righteousness and holiness of truth (v.24, Darby Trans. margin), the character which all came out so blessedly in the Lord Jesus Christ. It carries you far beyond anything that belonged to Adam innocent. The new man is "according to God", so we read, "Forgiving one another, so as God also in Christ has forgiven you" (4:32). And then also the pattern of love: "Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love even as the Christ also loved us..." (5:1). That is the likeness of God in you: you already have it in Christ and should seek to realize in your life now.

Now, in Colossians 3 you have the *image* side. "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (v.9, KJV). God has brought this wonderful thought to pass, and this new man in the moral likeness of God is representative of Christ who is the image of God (cp. 2 Corinthians 4:4). So it shall be that "when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory" (3:4). It is ours to be renewed in this knowledge now. Alas! the present condition of the church is far from representing Christ, but the day is coming when all the saints shall be seen in glory with Him, part of Himself. Then shall be seen the fulfilment of God's ideal, and Christ shall be manifested not only personally but also in the members of His body displaying all the beauty of His moral character.

Does that cause a thrill in your heart as you think of it? Does that make you enthusiastic at such an ideal, that you are going to be representative of Christ? Would you not like to go out even now and set Him forth to the whole world if you could? It is possible even now in a little way, as His grace possesses your heart and as His life fills you. But you are going to do it according to God's ideal, and you are not going to be disappointed in it. God's great thought is that Christ shall be "glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe" (2 Thessalonians 1:10).




Every other character of man goes out when Christ is brought in. "Where there is neither Jew nor Greek..." (Colossians 3:11). The Greek, the learned man, is not there, nor Jew, the religious man. Barbarian, the man that boasted in his prowess, is not there, nor Scythian who boasted in his refinement. Neither bondman nor freeman, with their social distinctions, is there. What is there, if none of these characters that are around us in the world today are seen? *Christ is there!* It is such a marvellous thought that it absolutely takes you out of yourself altogether.


That is just what God intends. He wants to entrance your heart with the wonderful plan that is before Himself, that Christ should be the centre, and that He should associate around Himself, to be representative of Him, filled with His own life, united to Him by the Holy Spirit, those in whom He shall be seen and glorified. This has been called God's masterpiece.

Then the full image will be manifest, but even now the likeness is being formed. We are to "put on, therefore, as the elect of God; holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (3:12-13). That is what I mean by the image being the intensification of the likeness. You could not represent Him unless you were morally like Him, and the present workmanship of God is directed toward bringing this about. He is taking all the circumstances of the way, and all the little things day after day, all the detail of our lives, the rough places as well as the smooth, the sorrow and the joy, and through and in all He is working out this great ideal for Himself.

This is an edited and abridged version of an article in *Scripture Truth*, 6 (1914), pp. 106-10.



*Then shall be  
seen the  
fulfilment of  
God's ideal,  
and Christ  
shall be  
manifested  
not only  
personally  
but also  
in the members  
of His body  
displaying  
all the beauty  
of His moral  
character*



# On Whose Authority?

## Creation Series Postscript, Part 2

David Anderson

### Introduction

My previous creation-postscript article in *Scripture Truth*<sup>1</sup> majored on the fact that the scientific hypothesis of evolution is used as an excuse by people to disregard the Bible as the authority, especially on the origin of life. This article considers two other branches of science, which contradict the plain teaching of the word of God about creation.

### Geology claims to have disproved the Bible

When a girl relayed to her mother what the children's club evangelist had said about the realities of heaven and hell, the mother complained to the club organisers. She said that she didn't mind her daughter being told "OK" Bible stories such as Noah and the Flood, but she objected to straight gospel-preaching. But how could anyone describe the account of the destruction of the earth and the total wipe-out of mankind (except for the eight saved in the ark) as OK? Only because the mother had been taught that the Flood was a myth and not a serious truth of Scripture. This is the direct result of the principle of uniformitarianism, first proposed in the study of geology over two centuries ago. Uniformitarianism is the claim that the natural processes now operating are alone sufficient to account for the development of the natural world in past ages; and it was early adopted by Darwin when he extrapolated the theory of macro-evolution from observation of the ("micro-evolutionary") differences between finches' beaks on different islands of the Galapagos in the 1830s.<sup>2</sup> And yet the fossil record rather points to catastrophism and rapid burial processes, which are more in line with the Flood account in Genesis 6-8, than to the ideas of slow deposition over millions of years. Modern geology has somewhat reluctantly reverted to including catastrophic explanations. And after the Indian-ocean tsunami of Boxing Day 2007, Japan's tsunami of 2011 that caused the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and recent UK severe flooding events, we know for certain that catastrophes do happen! Despite this, uniformitarianism still dominates scientific thinking, and the Flood is still treated as a myth. Sadly, this results in people accepting the word of scientists rather than the word of God. As a consequence they conveniently ignore the gospel warnings found in 2 Peter 2:4-9 & 3:3-9. But as believers we trust the plain truth of Scripture. As the Lord Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> *Scripture Truth*, January 2014.

<sup>2</sup> On this see the article in the January issue.


Himself said, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35, ESV); and, to His Father, “Your word is truth” (17:17).

### Physics claims that the universe was formed by a ‘Big Bang’!

This theory is now science’s predominant answer to the question of the origin of the universe (although all the explosions I have encountered as a chemist have caused chaos, not order!) By extrapolating data gleaned from present-day observations of the universe cosmologists suggest that it did actually have a beginning – in the “Big Bang.” But they only offer theoretical explanations for how the universe could have expanded from the original concentrated matter. And their theory can never account for how matter was *initially created*. Authoritatively, Genesis 1:1 declares, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”! Verses 14-19 then describe how the universe<sup>3</sup> was established (i.e., extra-terrestrial space was created) on the fourth day of creation. Although earth with its atmosphere is the focus of these verses of Genesis 1, several times the Old Testament states that God “stretched out the heavens”<sup>4</sup> – “like a curtain and spreads them like a tent to dwell in” (Isaiah 40:22 cp. 45:12, 18). God has positioned the earth within the universe. “He...hangs the earth on nothing” (Job 26:7). God created our universe through His Son, who upholds it “by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:2-3). The Son created all things and continues to hold everything together (cp. Colossians 1:17).

### “Science” claims to have proved that God does not exist

The combined current scientific views on origins advanced by evolutionists, geologists, and cosmologists provide militant atheists and aggressive secular materialists with a “scientific” basis for claiming, “There is *probably* no God!”<sup>5</sup> The psalmist

  
*Genesis  
 1:1  
 declares,  
 “In the  
 beginning  
 God  
 created  
 the  
 heavens  
 and the  
 earth”!*



<sup>3</sup> Although there is no Hebrew word for universe, the idea is represented by the phrase “the heavens and the earth”: see Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 10:14; Nehemiah 9:6, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Job 9:8; Isaiah 40:22, 44:24, 45:12, 51:13; Jeremiah 10:12, 51:15; Zechariah 12:1

<sup>5</sup> The slogan used in a humanist advertising campaign on London buses a few years ago.

has an answer for such statements. “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1, repeated 53:1). He is not calling such persons fools for *thinking* there is no God, but for *telling themselves* there is no God, because deep down in their minds they know the reality is that God does exist! The unbeliever does not disbelieve: he *rejects* – “in his heart,” and in the Bible the “heart” of man means his *will*. Though they will strenuously deny it, the fact is that “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 they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). “The things that are made” translates a single Greek word, *poiēma*, which is translated “workmanship” in Ephesians 2:10. When mankind honestly examines the universe, or the human body in its still-unfathomed complexity, Romans 1:20 says it must conclude they are God’s handiwork – bear His signature (cp. Psalm 19:1-6).

### PPS. Mind the Gap!

I have to include the “Gap theory” in this article because it was accepted, albeit uncritically, and taught by many 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelicals – including some of our Brethren forefathers (and it is still held by some Brethren today). Known also as the “Ruin-Restoration” theory, and upheld in the Scofield Reference Bible,<sup>6</sup> it admits geological and associated paleontological scientific teachings.<sup>7</sup> Thomas Chalmers<sup>8</sup> developed the “Gap Theory” to counteract the challenge of uniformitarianism by postulating a “gap of many ages of time” in between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, whilst remaining true to the literal six days of creation.

But there cannot be such a gap:

1. The Sabbath laws are founded upon the one-week timescale – the fact that the LORD worked for six days to make heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, then rested on the seventh day (Exodus 20:8-11 & 31:17, etc.). Therefore, His initial work, the creation of the universe from nothing (Romans 4:17 & Hebrews 11:3), is part of Day One, a fact that is clearly stated in Genesis 2:1-4. He asked Israel to obey this rule: six days of activity and one day’s rest (i.e., a *weekly* cycle of life), which He himself had established by His own example.

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<sup>6</sup> See footnote 2, on Genesis 1:1, in *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1917).

<sup>7</sup> Geology is the scientific study of solid earth (its rocks, strata, etc.) and the processes by which they form/change. Paleontology (palaeontology) is the scientific study of supposed “prehistoric life”, especially of fossils. They are interdependent with respect to assigning dates – the age of fossils is determined by their place in the “geological column,” whilst the age of strata is determined by the fossils they contain!

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) was a leading evangelical minister in the Church of Scotland, and after 1843 in the Free Church of Scotland.


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2. A fundamental truth of the gospel is that it was Adam's sin which brought death into the world (Romans 5:12). There was neither suffering nor death in the whole of creation until after the Fall/Curse (cp. Genesis 2:16-17 with chapter 3). 1 Corinthians 15:47 states that Adam was the first man – ever! “By a man came death” in verse 21 therefore means “by Adam,” who was not created until Day Six (Genesis 1:27).
3. Isaiah 45:18 clearly says that God did not leave the earth in a state of suspended emptiness. Genesis 1:2 records the immediate action of the Spirit of God upon the waters. Thereafter God formed the earth to be inhabited by mankind during Days Two, Three, Five, and Six.
4. Birds, fish, animals, etc., were not created until Days Five and Six, so fossils could not have been formed earlier than that. (The mass destruction of animal life during the Flood is sufficient to account for the fossil record.)
5. The Lord Jesus Christ connected Genesis 1:1 with 1:27 when He said in Mark 10:6 concerning marriage, “from the beginning of creation [i.e., 1:1], ‘God made them male and female.’” He also said in Luke 11:50 that mankind existed “from the foundation of the world,” again showing that Genesis 1:1 & 1:27 were concurrent in time (occurred in the same week).


A variation of the Gap theory was the Day-Age theory, that is, that geological epochs somehow can be mapped on to the creation “days”, which are viewed as figurative expressions. This can be readily dismissed by the recurrent statement “there was evening and morning, an xth day” (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23 & 31) and the explanation of the Sabbath in the Decalogue in (1) above.

### Conclusion: the authority of Scripture

As with all matters of life and faith, so also for teaching about Creation and the Creator: we stand



*When  
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or the human  
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says it must  
conclude they  
are God's  
handiwork –  
bear His  
signature*



by the authority of Scripture. We always should ask, “What do the Scriptures actually say about the issue?” (Luke 10:26; Romans 4:3; Galatians 4:30) We must continue to insist that God is always true (Romans 3:4). To the Corinthians Paul three times wrote that God is absolutely true to His word: “God is faithful” (1 1:9, 10:13 & 2 1:18). And, for myself, I have always lived by the axiom to believe Scripture even when the scientific teaching is to the contrary!<sup>9</sup> “Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever” (Psalm 119:160, KJV).

And science, at best, can answer “How?” and “What?” It can *never* answer the key question, “Why?” Why should anything exist, rather than nothing at all? The scientist may rightly rule such a question out of order as non-scientific; but he or she thereby rules him(her)self out, as a scientist, from making statements regarding the origin of the universe and the existence of God. But such questions must have *some* answer. All science is limited in scope to the natural and material universe. The Bible declares that “God is spirit” (John 4:24), therefore He cannot be discovered by scientific investigation: “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection [His limits, NKJV]?” (Job 11:7, KJV) But because *God* took the initiative, rather than man’s “searching” having the initiative, He can, and has, made nature the evidence of His own Being, as we have seen in Romans 1:20. And, so that we can know Him personally, God has revealed Himself to mankind through His word (cp. Psalm 19:7-14); but supremely through His Son, the Word (John 1:1-4, 14 & 18). Christ is the answer to the question “why?” – all things have been created by Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16-17 with John 1:1-3, Darby Trans.).

## Benediction and Doxology

I finish my series of *Scripture Truth* articles on creation with a Scriptural benediction from the Creator, one which closes with a doxology to Him.

“[The LORD (i.e., the Creator, see v.15)] will bless those who fear [him], both the small and the great. May the LORD give you increase, you and your children! May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth! The heavens are the LORD’s heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man. The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 115:13-18, ESV)

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<sup>9</sup> If Thomas Chalmers and others had stood by this principle there would be no “Gap Theory.” Historically, Christians had always accepted that Day One was described by Genesis 1:1-3; and that the universe was only a few thousand years old.

# Celebrating the Lord's Supper

## Part I: What bread?

Philip Nunn

*Some decisions in the Christian life can and should be left to individual consciences. Others, in their very nature, have to be reached by the entire congregation. In such matters, even smallish points can cause bitter divisions. How should they be resolved? This article and its sequel show how, in the matter of celebrating the Lord's supper.*

The night before the Lord Jesus was crucified, He called his disciples together and instituted the Lord's Supper, a simple symbolic meal that would remind them and future generations of Himself – and the centrality of His sacrificial death. The first Christian communities gave the celebration of the Lord's Supper the same level of importance as teaching, fellowship and prayer – they “persevered” in these things (Acts 2:42). How should we Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper today? What does the Bible teach? To what extent are the Biblical examples normative? Does the way we celebrate it really matter?

### The Passover feast as setting

The Lord Jesus could have instituted this symbolic meal at any time during the year, and yet He chose the Passover Feast as its setting (Luke 22:15-16). The disciples prepared for the Passover in an upper room (v.12), and “while they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat, this is my body.’ Then he took the cup...” (Matthew 26:27-29, NIV). Take note that the first Lord's Supper took place during the annual Jewish Passover feast, while Jesus and his disciples reclined around a table, on a Thursday evening (vv.17, 20). Why did our Lord choose the Passover as the setting for this new symbolic meal?

*Similarities:* The Passover feast and the Lord's Supper have interesting similarities: For example, the first Passover meal was eaten by the Israelites *on the night before* they left Egypt. The first Lord's Supper was eaten *in the night before* Christ was sacrificed. The lamb's *blood* applied to the door frame gave protection from judgement. There is also reference to Christ's blood in the Lord's Supper, “which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). In fact Christ and His redemptive sacrifice stand at the historic centre of these two symbolic meals: The Passover viewed Christ's redemptive work as a future event, and the Lord's Supper now views it as a past completed event (1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 9:28).

*Differences:* But there are also some significant differences. For example, central to the original Passover meal was the eating of roasted meat – a lamb without



defect. There is no meat in the Lord's Supper, since Christ Himself is seen as the Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Biblical instructions for the Passover in Exodus 12 make no mention of cups and drink. But in the Lord's Supper a cup and drink are central. The Passover feast was to be celebrated once a year; for the Lord's Supper the word "whenever" is used (1 Corinthians 11:25-26).



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### New and important

The Lord's Supper is a distinctively Christian symbol. It is not an adaptation of a Jewish rite. It is a positive, new, symbolic act initiated by the Lord Jesus Himself. The symbolism revolves around Christ and His sacrificial death. A study of the Old Testament will enrich our understanding and appreciation of Christ's sacrifice – but for guidelines as to *how* to practice the Lord's Supper, we must look exclusively to the New Testament. In the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) we are told *how* the Lord Jesus instituted this symbol. In the Acts we read about *how* the early church responded to Christ's request to "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). And in the rest of the New Testament we find insights into the meaning and value of the Lord's sacrificial death at Calvary.

How important is this symbolic meal to the Lord Jesus? Think about the unique setting – the Lord did not include teaching about the Lord's Supper among the list of good topics He addressed in the Sermon of the Mount or during some other teaching moment. He chose a unique, emotionally-charged moment, the day when He entered the culminating phase of His ministry on earth, when the dreadful reality of becoming a "sin offering" was weighing heavy upon Him. It was at this moment that He had determined to instruct His disciples on how He wished them to remember Him.

And notice the repetition – after the Lord Jesus ascended, perhaps some years later, the apostle Paul received an additional personal revelation from the

Lord Himself about the *why* and *how* of the Lord's Supper, a teaching he was expected to pass on to the churches: "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you..." (1 Corinthians 11:23-34). Christian congregations that give the Lord's Supper an important place in their community life have a good reason for doing so.

### The use of symbols

When Jesus instituted this symbolic supper, He took the bread and said, "This is my body." These words should not be taken literally. The Lord Jesus was not suggesting He had two bodies, His incarnate body and another body held in His hands. Then, taking the cup, He added, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:19-20). It would be more natural to understand these words figuratively, in the same way as when Jesus said, "I am the light," and "I am the gate" (John 8:12; 10:7). The bread and the cup are used in this meal in a symbolic way. They represent something.

### Leavened or unleavened bread?

We read that at the Passover Feast, "they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast" (Exodus 12:8). The absence of yeast in the bread was an important feature; in fact during the seven days of the feast every Jewish house should be free of yeast (Exodus 12:15, Mark 14:1). Since the Lord's Supper was instituted during the Passover feast, it is certain that the bread used for the Lord's Supper was *unleavened bread* (Luke 22:7). Does this mean that Christian congregations today should also use unleavened bread?

The New Testament has two Greek words for bread: *azumos*, used specifically for unleavened bread (e.g., 1 Corinthians 5:8); and *artos*, the general term for bread (e.g., 2 Corinthians 9:10). When describing the first Lord's Supper, Matthew writes, "While they were eating, Jesus took bread [*artos*], gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,



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'Take and eat; this is my body'” (Matthew 26:26). In fact, every time the Lord's Supper is narrated (also by Mark, Luke, and Paul) this general term for bread is used. If the absence of yeast in the bread were an important element of the symbol, like in the Passover, we would expect the use of the word *azumos* – thus making it clear that bread without yeast is required. The Lord's Supper is also referred to as the “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42; 20:7), and here also, *artos*, the general term for bread, is used. We conclude that by consistently choosing to use the general word for bread, the Holy Scripture intends to give liberty in the type of bread to be used. Each Christian congregation is at liberty to use either leavened or unleavened bread.

### One or more loaves?

Some ask, is the fact that the Lord Jesus took “one” bread significant? Does the symbolism lose anything if we were to use five or ten loaves, or have one small bread for each participant? After giving thanks for the bread, the Lord Jesus “broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me’” (Luke 22:19). Here the bread represents the *physical body* of the Lord Jesus that was “broken” for us on that cross at Calvary. Later we find the apostle Paul using the bread of the Lord's Supper to *also* represent the *spiritual body* of the Lord Jesus, the *one loaf* representing the unity of all true believers: “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is *one loaf*, we, who are many, are *one body*, for we all partake of the *one loaf*” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, italics added).

The fact that in every celebration of the Lord's Supper the bread is purposefully *broken*, suggests, I think, that the bread is primarily a symbol of the sacrifice of Christ's *physical body* – since there is no desire to symbolize a breaking of unity among believers. And yet, in a secondary way, we see in the “one loaf” a picture of the oneness of Christ's *spiritual body*, the oneness of all true believers worldwide (including those we disagree with) – also a thought that warrants our regular attention. We conclude here that the “oneness” of the loaf is not of prime symbolic importance when celebrating the Lord's Supper. But since the “oneness” of the loaf is given a secondary symbolic significance in Scripture, a congregation would do well to prefer the use of one loaf. In choosing to give every participant his own bread, the thought behind the “breaking” and “sharing” is obscured. In choosing to use multiple loaves, the thought behind the “worldwide unity” is obscured. If, given the size of the group, multiple loaves become necessary, the reality of our “oneness” with all believers may still be brought to the attention of the congregation verbally.

*To be continued.*

# Alpha People

## Ishmael

**George Stevens**

And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation (Genesis 17:20, KJV).

### Ishmael, son of a bonds slave

When Sarah realised that she was barren, she encouraged her husband to have a child for her through her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. This was accomplished, and the boy that was born was called Ishmael which means “God shall hear.” The relevance of this would become apparent later in the desert of Beersheba.

When the child was thirteen years old, he and Abraham were circumcised according to God’s command; but on that same day God promised Abraham a son and heir through Sarah (17:15-23). This one – Isaac – would be the son of promise, the one through whom God would bring the covenant-blessing by the Messiah in the future.

The apostle Paul tells us that Isaac and Ishmael set forth an allegory (Galatians 4:21-31). Ishmael was a picture of those who were under the bondage of Old-Testament Law, whereas Isaac was a picture of those saved by grace – born according to the Spirit as verse 29 puts it. The latter were called the true sons of Abraham because they had faith (Galatians 3:7).

### Ishmael, blessed of the Lord

Yet (returning to our story) Abraham had grown fond of Ishmael and cried to the Lord, “O that Ishmael might live before thee” (Genesis 17:18). The Lord replied with the blessing we have quoted at the head of this article.

### Ishmael the outcast

When Ishmael was about sixteen, there was a celebration upon the completion of baby Isaac’s weaning. It was at this party that Ishmael showed his envy of Isaac by mocking or persecuting him (21:9). So it is with all those who rest on their works for salvation. They mock Christians because of their liberty in this day of grace. Sarah insisted that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out of their home. Abraham was grieved when Sarah acted in this manner. The Lord reminded Abraham not to grieve: it would be through Isaac that his descendants would be blessed. So Hagar and Ishmael were cast out.

### Ishmael, a nation

As Hagar and Ishmael headed back to Egypt, Hagar’s homeland, they found themselves without water in the desert of Beersheba. Hagar realised they were

likely to die of thirst and moved a bowshot away from Ishmael. She cried, “Let me not see the death of the child” (21:16). She then wept. It was then that the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, “What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation” (vv.17-18; cp. v.13). Then “God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.”

So “God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer” (v.20). He later married an Egyptian who gave birth to twelve sons (21:21; 25:13ff). They gave rise to a people who later came to dwell “in the land that stretched from Havilah unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria” (v.18). This was probably stretching from the region of Sinai to the north west of Arabia. It was there that Ishmael died at the age of 137 years (v.17).

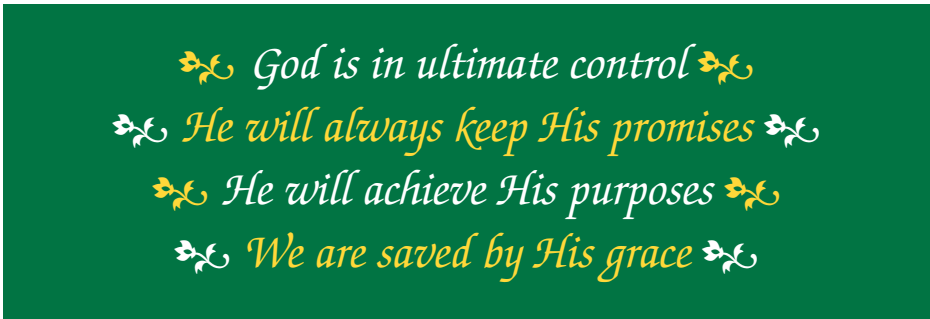
The Lord’s faithfulness to Ishmael has been remarkable, especially as his nation opposed Israel, the chosen people of God.

### Ishmael, the wild man

When Ishmael was born, the Lord said, “He will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren” (16:12). By this attitude descendants of Ishmael may be recognised. We may find it difficult to trace true Ishmaelites today, but we do see the unrest in the Middle East. They are continually at odds with others, especially those of Israel; and this will continue until the Messiah comes. Furthermore, Jerusalem itself contains a mix of nationalities. As it is written that Ishmael dwells in the presence of all his brethren, it is likely that many “Ishmaelites” are currently living in Israel.

### Applications

(i) We have the assurance that God is in ultimate control. (ii) He will always keep His promises. (iii) He will achieve His purposes. And (iv) we are saved by His grace and not by the works of the Law of Moses.



# Compare and contrast

Gordon Hughes

*Unlike any other book, there is always new and nourishing spiritual food to be gained from any part of Scripture. In this article the perfections of Christ are powerfully brought out of a quite unexpected passage.*

One of the standard exercises that I remember from my English lessons at school began with “Compare and contrast the following...” In a recent Bible reading on Romans 3, it occurred to me that this might be a profitable way of looking at parts of this chapter, especially verses 10-18. These verses are based upon quotations from the Old Testament. They are introduced by the apostle Paul as preparatory to the terrible condemnation of v.23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

An honest comparing of ourselves with verses 10-18 ought quickly to lead us to the conclusion that that diagnosis is all too true. Happy it is when the soul is prepared to put away any pretence of self-righteousness and bow to God’s view of our human condition! Job had to endure many trials before he was brought to an end of his protestations of righteousness. He finally confessed to God, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6, NKJV). Only then was God able to deal with Job in blessing, so much so that we read, “Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:12).

When we likewise turn to God in repentance and faith, then we, too, can know His blessing: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Comparison of ourselves with others is expressly condemned by Paul as foolishness (2 Corinthians 10:12). Comparing ourselves against God’s standard and realising our shortcomings is the first step on the way to receiving His blessing. Paul’s burning desire was “...that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Philippians 3:8-9).

Whereas we stand totally condemned by these verses in Romans 3, they stand as a yardstick by which, by way of contrast, we can appreciate all the more the perfections of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the main purpose of this article. We will go through the verses statement by statement and wonder at the total perfection we find in Him. In this way, I trust, “may [our] meditation be sweet to Him” (Psalm 104:34). The verses which we will consider by no means tell the whole story concerning Him. It may be that as you reflect upon them other similar statements concerning Him will spring to mind.

At the same time, these verses must challenge us. Peter reminds us that the Lord Jesus has left “us an example, that [we] should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). That eternal life which was seen in Him, “that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (1 John 1:2), is the same life which, through the grace of God, we have been given. The verses, then, must challenge us as to whether the life that was seen in Him is being seen in us too! For, “He who says that he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

### There is none righteous, no, not one

“Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46), the Lord Jesus could boldly ask. His enemies had already wanted to take Him but had been unable to find fault in Him (John 7:44-46). Now here they are being given the opportunity to take Him but they dared not because in Him there was no sin (1 John 3:5). He was totally righteous! Pilate, having tried the Lord Jesus, had to declare three times, “I find no fault in Him” (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). Even Pilate’s wife had to send a message to her husband, “Have nothing to do with that just Man” (Matthew 27:19).

### There is none who understands

Luke tells us of the Lord Jesus, as a boy of twelve, in the Temple, “sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers (Luke 2:46-47). Such was His understanding of His God that He would say shortly afterwards to Mary and Joseph, “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49) Returning to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, we read of Him, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men” (Luke 2:52).

### There is none who seeks after God

Mark tells us, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35). The Lord Jesus encouraged His followers to seek the presence of God in the quiet place: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place” (Matthew 6:6). This was clearly His practice, sometimes on the mountain (Matthew 14:23), sometimes in the wilderness (Luke 5:16). Supremely we see Him seeking His God in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-44).

### They have all gone out of the way

Preaching on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter plainly sees the language of Psalm 16 as being completely fulfilled in the Lord Jesus: “You have made known to Me the ways of life; You will make Me full of joy in Your presence” (Acts 2:25-28; cp. Psalm 16:11). It was only because He was continually in the way of His



Father that He could declare, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

### They have together become unprofitable

The Lord Jesus told even the apostles, “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:10). By contrast, Mark’s Gospel presents the Lord Jesus as the perfect Servant. His busy service is characterised by the key words, “immediately”, “anon”, “forthwith”, “straightway”, and “as soon as.” That Gospel ends by describing His service even beyond His ascension to heaven: “And [the disciples] went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them” (Mark 16:20).

### There is none who does good, no, not one

Peter describes the life of the Lord Jesus as follows: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). What better tribute to a life than that could be rendered! The multitude had rendered testimony to Him during His life: “And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak’” (Mark 7:37).

### Their throat is an open tomb

In this and the next verse, we have four parallel condemnatory statements about the words men use. James solemnly reminds us, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (James 3:6). With relief, we can turn from such sobering words to consider some of the lovely things which Scripture has to say about the words of the Lord Jesus.

The tomb is characterised by death and decay, as the Lord Jesus characterised the Pharisees with their words of would-be piety (Matthew 23:27). By contrast, Luke tells us, “So all... marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22). The Lord Jesus stood by the grave of Lazarus and called with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” Such was the power and authority of that life-giving call that Lazarus, who had been dead four days, could only answer to it and come forth in newness of life (see John 11).

### With their tongues they have practised deceit

The Lord Jesus told the unbelieving Jews, “You are of your father the devil... He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). It is surely significant that the first recorded lie in Scripture is that of the devil to Eve, “You will not surely die”

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(Genesis 3:4). That lie had the most disastrous consequences! By contrast, the Lord Jesus was able to continue, “But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me” (v.45).

### The poison of asps is under their lips

Many in the world today still die from snakebite, one of the awful consequences of that first sin in Eden (Genesis 3:15). The nation of Israel themselves knew from their history the fatal effects of snakebite (see Numbers 21). But the Lord Jesus was able to say, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). As the perfect servant of Jehovah, prophetically it could be said of Him, “The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the [instructed], that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary” (Isaiah 50:4). Good it would be if our lips knew something of that!

### Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness



The apostle Peter tells of the Lord Jesus, “‘Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:22-23). At Calvary, we read, “Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing” (Matthew 27:44). But to that penitent thief the Saviour would say, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

### Their feet are swift to shed blood

Think for a moment of those feet of the Lord Jesus that took Him to Sychar’s well in Samaria, “But He needed to go through Samaria.” What did it cost Him? “...being wearied from His journey, [He] sat thus by the well” (John 4:4, 6). The Lord Jesus had come to bring the water of eternal life to that needy Samaritan woman! But not to her only, for we read of the people of her village, “Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42).

### Destruction and misery are in their ways

Far from bringing destruction upon His people, the Lord Jesus longed to shelter them from the destruction which He knew would surely come upon them for their refusal to accept Him. His lament over Jerusalem is one of the most mov-

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ing in Scripture: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37) That destruction from which the Saviour sought to shelter Jerusalem most certainly fell when the Romans invaded the city in A.D.70.

### And the way of peace they have not known

Some seven hundred years before the Lord Jesus came into the world, He had already been marked out as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). “Peace on earth” was heralded by the angels as He came into the world (Luke 2:14). Before He left His disciples, the Lord Jesus sought to prepare them for the troubles that lay ahead by saying, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). We today come into that same peace, for “He Himself is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14).

### There is no fear of God before their eyes

The Lord Jesus sought to live His whole life in the fear of God. That fear was such an essential part of His being that even in Gethsemane, with the horrors of Calvary pressing upon His Spirit, He was still able to say to His Father, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39).

### Conclusion

We said at the beginning that the verses we have been considering are preparatory to the universal condemnation, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). That “falling short” is essentially a missing of the mark, a term used in archery when an arrow fails to hit its target. As we have seen when we contrast these statements with what we see in the Lord Jesus, there never was a time when He missed the mark of the glory of God. Indeed, in His prayer to His Father before the cross, He could rightly say, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work You gave Me to do” (John 17:4).

Psalm 69 is one of the psalms which graphically set forth Calvary, particularly depicting the Lord Jesus as a righteous Man suffering at the hands of sinful men. In verse 4, prophetically He says, “Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it.” As sinners, we have all, as it were, robbed God of the glory due to Him as His creatures. Not so the Lord Jesus! In a world where man had consistently failed to honour God, may the verses we have been considering, by contrast, deepen in our hearts the sense of how completely the Lord Jesus honoured God and gave Him glory! It may be then that we will know something of Paul’s message to the Corinthians, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

# The sword of Mordecai

Yannick Ford

*Some evils are not going to be abolished this side of the Lord's coming. Does that mean we must succumb to them? A striking lesson is drawn from the end of the book of Esther.*

“Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, and said, ‘If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king’s provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen?’ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, ‘Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s signet ring; for whatever is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring no one can revoke.’ So the king’s scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed it with the king’s signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds. By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king’s command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel. So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal

apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them." (Esther 8:3-17, NKJV)

Many of you will be familiar with some of the hymns of Joseph Hart: for instance, "How good is the God we adore." Recently, I came across his spiritual autobiography on the internet.<sup>1</sup> The way I found it was as follows: I had been reading a book in which the author quoted a striking sentence, but merely referenced it with something like "as another has said ..."! This is when one really appreciates Google in being able to simply type in the quote and see if one can find out where it came from! That is what led me to Joseph Hart's spiritual autobiography. In this short text, Joseph Hart describes how God graciously assured him of forgiveness and salvation. He says, "I cried out, 'What ME, Lord?' His Spirit answered in me, 'Yes, YOU!' I objected, 'But I have been so unspeakably vile and wicked!' The answer was, 'I pardon you fully and freely.'" Joseph seemed astonished and overwhelmed by God's personal interest in and love for him. And yet, that is what our God is like! Like Joseph Hart, I am often surprised by His grace and personal concern for my life.



*I cried out,  
'What ME,  
Lord?'*

*His Spirit  
answered in me,  
'Yes, YOU!'  
I objected, 'But I  
have been so  
unspeakably vile  
and wicked!'*



*The answer was,  
'I pardon you  
fully and freely.'*





*‘Fear not,  
for  
I have  
redeemed  
you;  
I have  
called you  
by your  
name;  
You are  
Mine.’*



I should not be surprised however, since the Bible shows clearly that God takes a personal interest in His people. The prophet Isaiah, speaking about God’s chosen people Israel, states this plainly in the first verse of chapter 43 of his prophecy: “But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.’” Look at all the reassurances packed into this short verse – God created Israel, He redeemed him, He called him by name, and He affirms His loving possession. We are no less blessed by the Lord Jesus: “...the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3).



The story of Esther and Mordecai is thrilling as a real-life example of how God takes a personal interest in His people. It is exciting to see how Esther is chosen as queen, how Mordecai is able to warn the king of an assassination plot, how the king cannot sleep and is reminded of Mordecai’s good deed just when the enemy Haman was coming in to arrange for Mordecai’s death. Here is a book that shows that God does and will intervene in our affairs, to bless us and to do us good. What, then, do we make of the passage I cited at the start of this article, in chapter 8?

Haman, the enemy, had been hanged, but the results of his wicked plots were potentially long-lived. He had persuaded the king to write a decree for the annihilation of

the Jews, and the king's decree could not be revoked. Robert Hawker, in his *Poor Man's Commentary*,<sup>2</sup> makes a very good point: "Reader! while we lament the pride and ignorance of man, who is every day liable to err, that any of his decrees should be irreversible, we cannot sufficiently admire and adore that glorious perfection of our covenant God, whose purposes in Jesus are like himself, unchangeable. Oh! the confidence the Lord's people find in this!"

What does the king do in such a case? He effectively reversed the decree, not by repealing it, which he could not, but by authorising and empowering the Jews to stand and fight against their enemies. If you read Esther chapter 9, you will see that this method worked very well. Haman's evil plan of annihilation had been thwarted.



This episode in the lives of Esther and Mordecai has been on my mind of late. Like the king's decree, there are certain things that cannot be reversed. My sinful flesh, for instance, cannot be made better. It will never learn to trust God and to love Him, and to cease from self-centred ways. That is why the Lord Jesus insists on the need to be born again – "...that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:6-7). As far as God is concerned, sinful flesh was judged at the cross, and is dead – see Romans 8:3 and 6:6. Nevertheless, its presence and effects can be distressing for us in our Christian



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*If we seek  
to stand  
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good of  
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that God  
has provided  
for us  
in His  
salvation*



pathway – “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Galatians 5:17). Like Esther and Mordecai, we need to avail ourselves of the “new decrees” of our King – for example, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18); or, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). If we look for the improvement of our flesh, or the improvement of the world system in alienation from God, or many other such things that cannot be reversed, we will be sorely disappointed, and the enemy, who seeks our hurt, will have some advantage over us. But if we seek to stand in the good of the “new decree,” like Mordecai, we will, in a practical sense, enjoy the blessings that God has provided for us in His salvation.



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<sup>1</sup> This is available on [http://www.gracegems.org/C/joseph\\_hart.htm](http://www.gracegems.org/C/joseph_hart.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Robert Hawker, *The Poor Man’s Commentary on the Bible* (London, new edition, 1822-6). This commentary is included in Bible software that I use (e-Sword), which is freely available, but the full text can also be found on the internet

## New for 2014: Concerning Himself by J T Mawson

Published 1 March 2014: Paperback; 170 pages;  
STP Price: **£6.00** plus postage & packing

An e-book edition for the Amazon Kindle is also available

Christianity is all about Christ, and unless He is the all-absorbing Subject of each Christian's life then, as John Owen wrote in *Christologia* as long ago as 1679, "whatever outward ornaments may be put upon its exercise, it is but a useless, lifeless carcass".

But where do we learn of Christ? On the opening page of the first issue of *Scripture Truth* in January 1909 its joint editors, J. T. Mawson and H. D. R. Jameson, were certain as they wrote,

"The Scriptures will always be prized by the children of God, not only because they come from God, but because they speak of Christ, and indeed it is only as this is seen, and Christ is loved, that they are understood. We shall endeavour, as time and space permit, to draw out from the Scriptures the things concerning Christ, believing that the surest way of preservation from the seductive movements, doctrines, and spirits that abound, is occupation with that which is good; for 'who is he that shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good' (1 Peter 3:13)."



Over more than 30 years, as he edited and contributed to *Scripture Truth*, J. T. Mawson was as good as his word, 'drawing out from the Scriptures the things concerning Christ'. The present volume contains thirteen inspirational articles on exactly this theme. They first appeared as a series entitled "Things Most Surely Believed" in Volumes 26-27 (1934-35) plus an additional article in Volume 28 (1936), and were revised and published in book form in 1936.

In this new edition, Scripture references have been checked and amended where necessary, and references have been added for some other verses quoted. Details of publications referred to in the text have been added at the end of the book.

"The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God to us; to them we turn for light and instruction as to Christ and His work. Old and New Testament bear their united testimony to Him, and the revelation that they give is wholly satisfying" (*from the Author's Preface*).

"The Word of God is the only authority upon which I base the assurance with which I have written of these things, and by the Word of God alone what I have written must be tested and judged" (*from the Author's Preface*).

# Our great High Priest

“Whatsoever ye shall ask my Father in my name, he will give it you”  
(John 16:23)

Children of God! in all your need,  
remember him who died for you;  
Ye suppliant! think, whene'er you plead,  
the Lord of Love is pleading too.

Nor pleads in vain — the Father hears  
the voice of his belovèd Son;  
'tis music in Jehovah's ears:  
He pleads — and lo! the suit is won.

“Father, forgive them!” Jesus cried  
when bleeding on th' accursed tree —  
“Bless, bless them, Lord, for this I died!”  
is still his all-prevailing plea.

Come, brethren, then; our feeblest prayer,  
perfumed with Jesus' blessèd name,  
is heard on high, is treasured there,  
and all that heaven can give may claim.

From everlasting we are His,  
in love's eternal counsel given;  
and he himself our portion is,  
the glory of our promised heaven.

Edward Denny, *Hymns and Poems* (London, 1848), pp. 93-94.