

Scripture Truth



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Faith
Atonement
A fulfilled life

Ruth 1: Choosing to follow God
An introduction to the Epistle of James

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Editor: Ian Britton

Editor's e-mail: editor@scripturetruth.org.uk

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications

31-33 Glover Street, CREWE, Cheshire CW1 3LD

Tel: 01270 252274

In this edition...

It is a very long time since I last ran in a 4 X 100m relay race, but I am feeling once again the slightly daunting sensation of receiving the baton and being responsible for the next leg of the race! I will try and run without too many stumbles!

This time we commence four series of articles:

Yannick Ford gives us an original and helpful outline of the Epistle of James, in preparation for a series of articles on that book.

Jonathan Hughes writes on the theme of Faith, with articles on Hope and Love to follow in subsequent quarters.

David Pulman describes “A Fulfilled Life”, which will be followed by items on “A Faithful Life” and “A Fruitful Life” by other authors.

Glenn Baxter, who many of us remember fondly, gives us an overview of Ruth chapter 1. Other writers will cover the rest of this short book.

You will see that I have added some study questions after most of the articles, which I trust will help you consider what you have just read and assist you in applying some of the lessons learned. If you are like me, you will recognise how quickly you can forget any message you have just read or heard, and therefore any help with this is most beneficial!

I hope the brief study of the Bible word “Atonement” will be helpful to you. Other, similar, articles may follow as space allows.

Please feel free to let me know what you think about any of the content and layout of the magazine using editor@scripturetruth.org.uk

IAN BRITTON

Ruth 1: Choosing to Follow God

Glenn Baxter

Only two books in the Bible are named after women. Both are in the Old Testament, and both describe women who have attractive, loyal and determined characters. The first of these women is Ruth and the second is Esther. This is the first of four articles on the book of Ruth: one covering each of the four chapters.

The first verse of the book tells us that the events of Ruth are set in the times when the judges ruled Israel, a period described in the book of Judges. We are not told exactly when Ruth lived, but most of those times were bleak. God's people, Israel, kept forsaking Him and God punished them using the surrounding nations. When Israel could no longer bear the punishment, they would pray to God for help and God would provide a judge who delivered them. For a while, Israel would then be faithful to God but soon they would return to their old ways. The whole pattern was then repeated. The last verse of the book of Judges reads: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (23:25). Immediately after that verse, appears the delightful little book of Ruth which, although beginning with failure, ends with the mention of David, the king through whose line Christ would appear.

I will divide chapter one into four sections:

1. Going to Moab – vv.1-5.
2. Leaving Moab – vv.6-7.
3. Decision time – vv.8-18.
4. Back in Bethlehem – vv.19-22.

Going to Moab

In these verses we are introduced to six of the seven named characters in the book of Ruth; the seventh is Boaz who is introduced in the first verse of chapter two. First, we meet Elimelech, then his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Elimelech, as the head of his family,

was faced with a difficult situation. His home town, Bethlehem, was suffering from a severe famine. Should he move from his home in the land of promise given to Elimelech's people by God? Elimelech decided to move his family to Moab where there is food. In Moab, Elimelech dies. His two sons marry girls from Moab, Mahlon marrying Ruth and Chilion marrying Orpah. Then Mahlon and Chilion die! Naomi had lost the three men in her life. She, Ruth and Orpah were all widows.

In Bible times, the meaning of names was important. Place names also had important meanings. Bethlehem means 'house of bread', yet here was a situation where there was no food in the house of bread! Was God trying to tell Elimelech something? We do not read of Elimelech praying and seeking God's mind about this matter. On the face of it, the decision he took to move his family seems perfectly reasonable. His main concern surely was to ensure the physical wellbeing of his sons and his wife. But for a follower of God is that *really* the matter of overriding importance? The Bible teaches us that our spiritual needs come first. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 the divine order is: spirit, soul, and body. Where did God's things fit into Elimelech's reckoning? The people of Moab had regularly been Israel's enemies and they worshipped false gods. Living amongst them might get food in the short term but at what cost to the spiritual wellbeing of his wife and sons? Elimelech's name means 'to whom God is king'. Elimelech is one of those people whose actions did not live up to his name. He did not make God king of his life! The consequences of his decision to move to Moab were disastrous for both him and his family as we have already noted. This has lessons for us today. How important it is to always put God's things first, to pray long and hard about matters until God makes His mind clear to us. I am not suggesting it was easy for Elimelech; it was a hugely difficult decision for him; and ensuring that the spiritual welfare of our families comes before everything else is no easy thing for us. Elimelech should not have left God's house of bread whatever the short-term difficulties might have been and whatever the superficial attractions of Moab were. Moab was a spiritually dangerous place.

Leaving Moab

In verse six Naomi, Elimelech's widow, hears that there is food again in Bethlehem. We read, "[Naomi] had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread." Presumably there continued to be food available in Moab, but after more than ten years there, Naomi is faced with a decision: will she choose the bread of Bethlehem, or the bread of Moab?

Naomi's name means pleasant, and, despite all her problems, she comes across as an impressive woman, devoted to her family. Whatever she thought of her husband's decision to move from Bethlehem to Moab, she remained loyal to him. We will see shortly that, in Moab, she must have shown sufficient testimony to God to introduce Him to her daughter in law, Ruth. Throughout chapters two, three, and four, Naomi gives sound advice to Ruth and is always there to give support. What an invaluable role a godly woman can have! Naomi lives up to her name by having a pleasant and wholesome effect on others. In verses six and seven, Naomi makes the right decision. She puts aside the bread of Moab and sets out to return to the bread in the place provided by God. Today, Christians cannot be sustained and built up other than by feeding on Jesus who said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:48) and on the Word of God, the Bible. Naomi would have got nowhere spiritually if she had remained in Moab. She set out to return, taking her daughters-in-law with her. If any Christian has strayed from God's things, a return in repentance is always possible, but that initial decision to return, and then real action to return, must come from the individual.

Decision Time

Having decided to return to Israel, Naomi addresses her two daughters-in-law in verse eight, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me." Naomi then goes on to tell them that there are no natural reasons why they should go with her. Naomi says that she is too old to have another husband and to bear sons. Even if she did, her daughters-in-law would not wait until those sons became old enough to marry. She urges

them to go back to their people. Why did Naomi go out of her way to emphasise to them all the downsides of going with her to Bethlehem? Surely it would have been a good thing for them to move from Moab to Israel, where the true God was known. And yet Naomi seems to discourage them from going with her. An important Biblical principle is being presented here. These young ladies each had to make up their own minds, *not* to be committed to Naomi, but to be committed to Naomi's God. They would be stepping out into an uncertain future, in a strange country with no possessions. Things would be much easier with support back home from their families. Naomi could help and guide, but unless Ruth and Orpah each had a personal commitment to God, the way ahead would prove difficult, if not impossible. It is no different today. The Christian life is tremendous and has the promise of being in heaven with Jesus for eternity. But that life is not easy, and unless it is underpinned by a firm personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, problems will arise.

In verse 14 the two young women take different paths. "Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her." When Naomi suggests that Ruth should return as well, she responds in a very well known, and beautiful way. "Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me'" (vv.16-17). Orpah was full of tears and kissed Naomi, but she chose to go back to her own people and, following the application which we are giving this true story, she turned her back on God, not prepared to step out for Him. We do not read any more about Orpah. What a lovely contrast there is in the choice made by Ruth! She was not deterred by her sister-in-law's decision, but made the choice firmly and beautifully set out in the words just quoted. Ruth chose to move to a new country, a new home, a true God, and a different future. She expressed her full commitment

to God. It is what we would nowadays call confessing Jesus as Lord, not just acknowledging Him as Saviour.

Here, near the border of Moab and Israel, is a young woman facing lots of uncertainties, but who is sure in her knowledge that she is committing herself to the Lordship of heaven. It fits perfectly with what Paul and Silas told the jailor in Philippi: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31), and with what Paul wrote in Romans 10:9: “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” When anyone becomes a Christian, he/she moves from the control of one master, Satan, to a new Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord’s control is demanding but not burdensome. A Christian is expected, not to live for himself or herself, but to live for the One “Who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). In this Old Testament picture, Ruth made this commitment and we never read of her life falling short of that statement. I find this quite a challenge. Some time ago, my wife and I had the privilege of being present at a Christian wedding where verses 16 and 17 of Ruth 1 were used in the wedding service as a statement of commitment between bridegroom and bride. Commitment to one another in marriage vows is important. Real commitment to the Lord Jesus is vital for Christians and Ruth has much to teach us. When Naomi perceived that Ruth had made up her mind to continue with her to Bethlehem, Naomi accepted the situation, no doubt happy for Ruth to be with her. It is a good thing to be “determined” to proceed along the way ahead, just like Ruth in verse 18.

Back in Bethlehem

It had been many years since Naomi had left Bethlehem with her husband and two sons. The years away had been tragic ones and Naomi would perhaps have aged prematurely because of the sad events in her life. As we noted earlier, Naomi’s name means pleasant, but she suggests to the Bethlehem women that it would now be more appropriate to call her Mara, which means bitter. In leading her back to her spiritual

What an invaluable role a godly woman can have!

home, God had had to take her through many difficult circumstances so that she was now empty of all that she had possessed when she left Bethlehem. Sometimes when we as Christians stray from our spiritual roots, God takes us through difficult circumstances to show us that our true resources are only found in Him. God always seeks restoration and blessing for His people. At this stage, Naomi did not know the blessings that would come through Ruth.

Notice the phrase “Ruth the Moabites” in the last verse of Ruth 1. This is the first of five times in the book of Ruth that this phrase is used.¹ What did it mean to belong to the tribe and land of Moab? In the last few verses of Genesis 19, you will see that Abraham’s nephew, Lot, became drunk on consecutive nights and his two daughters slept with him. They both became pregnant. The sons born as a result of these sad events were called Moab and Ben-Ammi and their descendants, the Moabites and the Ammonites, became enemies of God’s people. The Old Testament has many prophecies against Moab and the nation was excluded from God’s things. For example, Deuteronomy 23:3 says that a “Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the LORD”. In this last verse of Ruth 1, we have the statement that “Ruth the Moabites...came to Bethlehem”, the very place where around 1,300 years later, Jesus would be born!

Undeserved Blessing

As we read through the book, we see Ruth brought increasingly into God’s blessing, despite being from Moab. Ruth did not deserve it, but through Naomi’s testimony and the actions of Boaz, she is found by the end of the book bearing a son who was the forefather of King David, an important ancestor of Christ. Ruth is even mentioned in the genealogy

¹ Ruth 1:22, 2:2 & 21, 4:5 & 10.

of Jesus, in Matthew 1:5. Yet constantly in this book there are reminders that she was a Moabitess. What a picture of everyone who becomes a born-again believer in Jesus! No believer deserves it! Each believer has been brought, like Ruth, from the distance of sin right into the presence of God the Father. It is a good thing for us to constantly remind ourselves that each of us was like a Moabite, a sinner, and to recognise God's grace in making us one of His people.

Study Notes

- List some parallels, or similarities, between yourself and Ruth, and between the society we live in today and the one that Ruth lived in.
- What kind of influence did Naomi have on Ruth? Is there anybody you could influence in similar ways?
- Elimelech made several unwise choices, as Glenn points out in this article. Rather than feeling a little smug that you are smarter than Elimelech (!), think of ways you might be at risk of making the same errors and how you might avoid doing so.
- God led Naomi through difficult circumstances to bring her back to Himself and bless her again. Have you had similar experiences that you might use to help somebody else who is struggling at the moment?

Faith

Jonathan Hughes

Three eternally abiding Christian qualities are often linked together in the New Testament: faith, hope, and love. Perhaps, the most obvious is in 1 Corinthians 13:13 where, unlike other gifts from God, these three remain forever (despite what some hymn lyrics suggest!). Love is an intrinsic part of the nature of God, and it ranks supreme – God *is* love. The Bible does not say that God is either faith or hope, but rather that He gives these gifts for our benefit. Please pause in your reading of this article and read Romans 5:2-5, Galatians 5:5-6, Colossians 1:4-5, and 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 5:8, where these three qualities are all found in close proximity.

However, in this series of three articles, I would like to focus our considerations on the final three chapters of Hebrews. In chapter 11 the focus is on faith, in chapter 12 we see something of hope, and in chapter 13 we read about love. Hebrews chapter 11 has rightly been called the gallery of faith – containing as it does portraits of sixteen named men and women from the Old Testament, who demonstrate what a living faith looks like in the everyday choices of life. The chapter begins with the words, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, NKJV). Strictly speaking, verse 1 is not a definition of what faith is, but rather a description of what faith does. I like the acrostic for faith – Forsaking All I Trust Him. This could rightly be applied to all the characters mentioned in chapter 11 of Hebrews and is something that should mark the life of all believers, in every age.

Substance

The word “substance” (Greek: *hupostasis*) occurs only five times in the New Testament; three of them in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 1:3 it is used in the phrase describing Christ as, “the express image of [God’s] person.” This could be translated literally as the “exact expression of the substance of Him.” It is used to convey the idea of absolute reality – that the Son was of absolutely the same nature as the Father. In Hebrews

3:14 it is translated as “confidence”, and also in 2 Corinthians 9:4 and 11:17. Faith substantiates the object of our belief, making it as real to us as if it were visibly present. If I were to give you the title deeds, with your name on, of a property you had never seen before, these would be the substance of that property – not the house itself, but the certain knowledge that the house belonged to you.

Evidence

The word “evidence” (Greek: *elenchos*) is used here and in 2 Timothy 3:16, where it is translated as reproof and carries the idea of genuine conviction. Faith leads us to understand that everything God says is absolutely genuine and we are to be fully convicted of this fact. It gives an unshakeable certainty to what we believe.

Faith then, leads us to accept all that God has said as being more certain than if we could see it with our own eyes. We sometimes use the clause “seeing is believing”, which suggests that certainty comes with sight. However, this is not always true. A thirsty person in the desert sees a mirage, but it is not real! When we were house hunting, I remember looking at pictures of a property online and then being mightily disappointed when I viewed the property for real! The camera certainly does sometimes lie!

Faith allows us to go beyond sight to a place of utter certainty. You may recall the time in Luke 8:48 when the woman with an issue of blood came to touch the hem of Jesus’ cloak. Jesus sent her away healed with the words, “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.” There may well have been nothing to see in her healing, it might have been an internal act of powerful grace, but her faith meant that she knew peace in her situation, as she had been made whole. Our faith enables us to take all that God has said in His word and make it absolutely certain for ourselves. Perhaps, like me, you might cry out: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

Scripture speaks of faith in at least three ways. Theologians like to rigidly divide them, and some verses really do have one of the three aspects in

view. But very often, in the everyday experiences of life, all three should be taken as a whole.

Firstly – Faith, especially when referred to as “the faith”, refers to the gospel and all its truths – what Paul refers to in 2 Timothy 1:13 as, “the pattern of sound words”. This is very much the thought in Paul’s challenging words to Timothy: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Secondly – Faith can also mean an acceptance of something as being true. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Here, the thought is that, when we accept Jesus Christ as Saviour, in a once-and-for-all act, certain things happen – He justifies us, and He makes peace for us.

Thirdly – Faith can also mean to an ongoing, living quality that is operative in our lives: “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17). Because God’s word is utterly reliable and because I have trusted in Him, I now ought to live in daily dependence upon Him, knowing that this is the only right and logical way to live.

It makes no sense to think that I need Christ to save me from my sins, but I do not need Him to live day by day. Likewise, it makes no sense to believe that there is a hell to be avoided, but not a heaven to be prepared for.

Returning to Hebrews 11 then, we see that it was faith that made the difference to the lives of those individuals mentioned in that chapter. None of these men and women were born heroes. They were not exceptional people by birth right. What made them stand out, were the consequences of the choices that they made, and those choices were influenced and informed by their faith. They could have chosen an easier, safer, path in life, and conformed to the lives of those around them, but then they would not have stood out. In fact, they would have been quite ordinary, and they would have lost their place in the gallery of faith. If Hebrews 11 was to be updated to include heroes of faith up to the present day, I wonder who would be included? There would be openings for all those who have the courage to leave behind the more frequently travelled path, and who are ready to accept a life of difficulty

and hardship. The question then is, why would you want to do this? Why would Noah want to spend 100 years building a boat in the middle of dry land, when he could have been off on holiday, or out partying? Why would Abram leave home and travel to a faraway country when he could have been making himself rich as he pursued his career? If this life is all that there is, then their choices would make no sense. On the other hand, the actions of Adam and Eve would make perfect sense – they each had a nice full tummy, after having a good meal! In each case, what makes the difference is the absolute conviction that this life is *not* all that there is. There is an unseen world for which this life is only the preparatory phase!

If I want to live with complete certainty that the world to come awaits me, and that how I live now will affect my position in that world, then this must influence every aspect of my life.

For example, I might have £1,000 to spare and so decide to book a lovely holiday and enjoy myself for a week. Alternatively, I could give the money to the work of the Lord and receive a reward which will last for eternity. You have to ask where the smart money is! However, while this kind of reasoning should be a general guide to the giving of our money and time (and the making of our choices), faith should lead us to actively involve the Lord in *every* decision we make. It might be that the Lord intends me to go on holiday, so that I might rest and recharge. I will need to fully involve Him in the decision-making process to make sure that I make the right choices in each case!

The hymn “He lives” (I Serve a Risen Saviour) contains the lines, “He walks with me and talks with me”. We might sing them often enough, but do we know the reality of this every day? When was the last time I prayed about whether He wanted me to pursue my career rather than devote more time to other things? When did I last ask Him about how He wanted me to spend that free weekend? God gives us all things richly to enjoy, but sometimes He may give them to us so that we can give them back to Him! Faith should make us live each day as if He was physically with us in the room, in the car, in our assemblies, etc. What a difference that would make!

In closing our considerations about faith, we need to recognise that, although living a life of faith may be costly, and certainly will not be comfortable, it is most definitely the best life we can live. Remember the time when the disciples were in the boat with the Lord Jesus in Matthew 8:23–26. Though the storm was severe, they were in the right place – they were with Jesus. Having heard their cries, Jesus said to them: “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” (v.26). Nothing would have happened to them had they kept quiet, because they were with Jesus. When we exercise our faith and apply it to every aspect of our lives, then we also can know the great calm that His presence gives. It is because I do not really live my life in this way, that when the big storms of life arise, I find that I have not trained myself to hear His voice, and to appreciate His presence, so I panic and lose control. How much I need to exercise the eyes of faith that will enable me to see Him on a daily basis.

When the king of Syria surrounded the city of Dothan in Elisha’s day, Elisha advised his young servant, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed, and said, ‘LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6:16-17). What great faith Elisha had! It enabled him to see what the real situation was, and it kept him from a great deal of grief. Faith, that bedrock certainty, that substance, will likewise enable us to see things as they really are, and may save us from, or will keep us going through, much trouble.

Study Notes

- Did you read the other New Testament sections where Faith, Hope and Love are mentioned together that Jonathan mentions in his first paragraph? If not, make time to do so now. They are Romans 5:2-5, Galatians 5:5,6, Colossians 1:4,5 and 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 5:8.
- Can you explain how Faith and Hope will continue eternally as the writer suggests?

Atonement

Ian Britton

Hebrew: kaphar

Greek: Not used in New Testament!

English Meaning

The English word atonement derives, very simply, from combining the elements at-one-ment. Although some have claimed that the word was invented by William Tyndale¹ for his Bible translations in the early 1500s, it was apparently in use in English before this, and originally meant, simply, oneness, or reconciliation. After it had been adopted for use in Bible translation by Tyndale, and later by the authors of the King James Version, its usage in everyday English disappeared, and the meaning of “a sacrifice that covered the guilt of sins” displaced it.

Hebrew Meaning

The literal meaning of the Hebrew word “kaphar” is to cover over. In the Old Testament this idea of “covering” is almost always used figuratively. In English we use the term “cover-up” with negative overtones, meaning something is being deliberately concealed to protect guilty people from punishment. In Hebrew it is being used in a positive way! Imagine an offence has been committed, but rather than the victim being angry, they decide to “cover” the offence and choose not to see it - this is the way “kaphar” is commonly used in the Old Testament. The word can also infer that a gift is being made to “cover over” the offence. You can see how this usage gives the word connotations of forgiveness and mercy, and this has resulted in those words being used in some English Bible versions when translating the word “kaphar”.

In the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 23:27 amongst others) was the one day of the year when the high priest could

¹ William Tyndale did coin some new words, including Passover and scapegoat. He also introduced many common expressions into English, such as “the salt of the earth” and “a moment in time”.

enter the holy of holies in the tabernacle, or temple. Jews call the Day of Atonement “Yom Kippur”. Kippur is another anglicised spelling of the Hebrew word Kaphar (Yom means day). The variety of spellings (“kaphar” and “kippur”) occurs because Hebrew uses a very different alphabet from English, as well as different pronunciations, so the Hebrew letters must be translated into something that provides roughly the same sounds in English. This has historically led to different spellings.

First use in the Bible

The first time that the word “kaphar” appears in the Bible is in Genesis 6:14, where God says to Noah, “Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover (“kaphar”) it inside and outside with pitch.” This is also the only time in the Bible where the literal meaning of the word “kaphar” is used. The pitch “covered over” the joints between the wooden planks and prevented water from coming in and sinking Noah’s boat. The literal covering of the ark with pitch also provided safety and security, meaning there is a little echo of the figurative meaning in this passage as well.

In almost every other reference, and it is used over 100 times in the Old Testament, “kaphar” is translated by the phrase “make atonement”, or something similar. There are a couple of places where the NKJV translates it using the word “appease”. Other English translations make use of similar phrases in a few more passages. As noted above, some versions occasionally use the words forgiveness and mercy when translating “kaphar”.

Old Testament Usage

The Old Testament uses the word “atonement” to describe the sacrifices of animals that “covered” the sins of those who offered them from the sight of God. Since we know that animal sacrifices could never actually remove the guilt of those sins (see Hebrews 10:4), and that the sacrifices, including the annual Day of Atonement, had to be repeated over and over again, atonement does not have the sense of finality that the New Testament associates with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (see, for example, Romans 6:10 and Hebrews 9:28).

New Testament Usage

At first sight, it is surprising that there is no equivalent Greek word to the Hebrew “kaphar” found anywhere in the New Testament. This is *not* because Greek did not have a word with the same meaning. The Greek word “exilaskomai” shares the same meaning and is used around 90 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, that we call the Septuagint, to translate the Hebrew word “kaphar”. However, the word “exilaskomai” is never used in the Greek New Testament. Since the Greek New Testament never uses a word with the same meaning as “kaphar”, it is understandable that English New Testament translations never use the word atonement (with an odd exception here and there!). This begs the question, why does the word atonement (“kaphar”) disappear in the New Testament?

One answer is that since the Old Testament word implies the covering of sins, rather than their removal, the New Testament writers felt that it was not an appropriate word to describe the work of Christ, which *does* completely remove our sins. This is not wrong, but it may not be the complete answer. It can be argued that the word “kaphar” in the Old Testament *does* sometimes refer to more than just the temporary, ceremonial covering over of sins that the Jewish offerings provided. It might be better to say that the New Testament writers wanted to emphasise the greatness and fulness of the work that Christ accomplished by His death and resurrection. The New Testament therefore uses a wide range of words, which get translated into English as redemption, propitiation, reconciliation, ransom, justification, salvation, and more! It seems that the Holy Spirit wanted to emphasise the great scope and depth of what the sacrifice of Christ accomplished. So, rather than use a word that was strongly connected with the Old Testament offerings, the New Testament uses a wide variety of words that emphasise how vastly greater the death and resurrection of Jesus are than the death (with no possibility of resurrection!) of the animals which could only prefigure Christ’s once-for-all work.

An Introduction to the Epistle of James

Yannick Ford

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.” James 1: 2-6 (NKJV)

It is said of some Bible books that, ‘The key hangs by the door’, meaning that the early verses give a good overview of the whole book. The verses quoted above give a good summary of James’s letter, which considers the reality of true faith and the patience that demonstrates that faith. Also it shows how we can live in the light of the Lord’s coming, while developing our Christian characters into completion, and asking God in faith for the ability to do all these things. But how can we best construct an overview of a letter that, if read casually, seems to jump from topic to topic?

One way to do this is *not* to read it casually! James’s letter repays careful reading to try and see how the Holy Spirit directed James’s flow of thought and what he wrote. In this introductory article, I want to look at some of the main themes and their inter-connectedness. Let us start by considering the human author of this letter.

There are a number of men called James in the New Testament, and there is no authoritative, definite pronouncement of which one of these wrote this epistle. But many commentators believe that it was the James referred to as “the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:19), who seems to have been a leader in the church at Jerusalem (Acts chapter 15:13) and was possibly converted when he saw the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15:7).

The letter that James wrote has been described by several writers as

a New Testament counterpart to the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament, because of the way that James writes and the kinds of subjects that he addresses: faith, patience, not loving money or showing favouritism to the rich, guarding our tongue, and seeking wisdom.¹ Without being dogmatic, if indeed James “the Lord’s brother” was the author of this letter, it potentially gives us a fascinating insight into what it was like to live with the Lord while He was growing up! Although the Lord’s brothers did not believe in Him at first (John 7:5), how the Lord behaved day to day must have had a profound impact on them. Doubtless He embodied the true principles that we read about in the Proverbs, which were to live daily in the wisdom that comes from the fear of the Lord. James’s letter is very practical for day-to-day living as a Christian. Just as the Proverbs guide us in so many facets of our everyday life, so James’s letter instructs us on how to live as a Christian seven days a week.

I tried to map out James’s letter on several sheets of A4, attempting to discern the flow of thought and argument. When mapped out visually, one can see several connections between different parts of his letter. It seems to me that James addresses several subjects one by one in an overall flow of thought, but that at each point, he stops to work through the idea to its logical conclusion in terms of our Christian behaviour. Thus, in terms of a map, it is like travelling along a main road of thought, but stopping to explore each town on the way, to see what that thought should look like in practice.

It is worth pointing out at the start, that not all of James’s intended recipients were necessarily converted. W. Kelly notes that the salutation at the start is to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1), whereas Peter addresses his first epistle to “the pilgrims of the Dispersion...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:1,2).² If, as I mentioned earlier, James the author was James the brother of the Lord, he would have known what it meant to be

1 See for example this helpful article on the web: <https://truthandtidings.com/2007/02/proverbs-primer-for-princes-10-proverbs-in-the-epistle-of-james/>

2 See <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/kelly/2Newtest/james.html#a0>

converted later in his life (beyond youth at least), and so the epistle contains some appeals for those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus as Saviour. But the letter is nonetheless very much for Christians.

In terms of a map, here is a suggested outline of James's epistle:

1:1-8 Counting it joy when falling into trials and developing patience

1:1-4 Working this through to perfection

1:5 Asking God for wisdom to do this

1:6-8 Making sure that we ask in faith

1:9-17 Enduring trial to receive the crown of life

1:9-11 Riches and poverty will be part of that temptation – the poor can glory in this, but the rich must be humble, because like the flower of the field they will pass away

1:12 Those who endure will receive the crown of life

1:13 Remember that trial and temptation are not the same, and God never tempts anyone with evil

1:14-15 On the contrary, we are tempted by our own desires, which lead on to sin and then death

1:16-17 God, on the other hand, gives every good and perfect gift...

1:18-27 Being brought forth by His Word

1:18 ... one of the most wonderful gifts being that He brought us forth by His Word

1:19-20 If we were brought forth by God's Word, we should be slow to put forward *our* words ...

1:21 ... but rather receive with meekness His implanted Word

1:22-25 Making sure that we are doers of that Word and not hearers only

1:26-27 With one result being that we are careful with our tongues and words

2:1-13 Not showing partiality (Returning to 1:9-11 above)

- 2:1-7 Because God has chosen the poor, but our temptation is to dishonour the poor and admire the rich, even though they often behave dishonourably
- 2:8-9 Which is to break the royal law
- 2:10-11 And since One God gave the law, to break any part of it is to go against His wishes
- 2:12-13 Let us remember that we now live in grace, with the law of liberty, and so we should remember to show mercy.
- 2:14-26 Faith without works is dead**
- 2:14-18 As can be illustrated by our actions towards the poor brothers and sisters
- 2:19-20 Intellectual assent is not enough
- 2:21-26 Abraham and Rahab illustrate true faith in action
- 3:1-12 We must bridle our tongues** (Returning to the thought of 1:26-27)
- 3:1-12 Let us not be many teachers, since we will be held to a higher level of accountability, and it is so difficult to keep our tongues from speaking evil
- 3:13-18 Wisdom from above**
- 3:13 is needed to modify our speech and conduct (we can ask God for wisdom, as we considered in 1:5-8)
- 3:14-16 While earthly wisdom leads to envy and self-seeking...
- 3:17 ...The wisdom from above is pure and peaceable
- 4:1-17 God gives grace to the humble, but resists the proud** (a quote from Proverbs 3:34)
- 4:1-2a Wars and strife come from envy and self-seeking (see 3:16), and also from our desires (see 1:14-15) ...
- 4:2b-3 ... and from either not asking, or asking in the wrong way – compare this with 1:5-8
- 4:4-6 Let us not become friends of the world, but rather humbly receive God's grace as ministered by the Holy Spirit of grace

- 4:7-10 Repenting and humbly turning to God – a section that seems to be an appeal to the unconverted
- 4:11-12 Continuing with the thoughts of humility, not breaking the royal law, and bridling the tongue, let us not speak evil of one another, as if we were the Judge
- 4:13-17 Part of humility is not to boast about tomorrow, as if we were in control of our lives – consider 1:9-11
- 5:1-12 Judgement is coming...**
- 5:1-6 ... and the unjust behaviour of the rich will be condemned – see 1:9-11 & 2:6-7
- 5:7-12 For the Christian, the coming of the Lord means living patiently in the expectation of His coming, which works back to 1:1-4 on patience.

Regarding the coming of the Lord:

- 5:7 It requires patience
- 5:8 It is at hand
- 5:9 Let us not be tempted to lose patience and end up grumbling at one another
- 5:10-11 Job, and the prophets are good examples of patience
- 5:12 So let us be straightforward in our speech
- 5:13-20 The prayer of faith will save the sick**
- 5:13-16 The context seems to suggest sickness as a result of a sin, rather than sickness in general
- 5:17-18 The reference to Elijah reminds James's Jewish readers about the judgement of no rain and the grace of rain given again, as well as Elijah's faith in God, all of which would encourage one who was sick because of some sin
- 5:19-20 With a final reference to the blessedness of work which humbly and graciously puts someone back onto the right pathway

So, we begin with patience in trials, working through these trials with

endurance, with the comforting reminder that we were brought forth by God's Word. As such, we need to be doers of the Word, not showing partiality, not using our tongues badly, seeking wisdom from above for all these things, and knowing that God gives grace to the humble. The Lord is coming, and we need to live in the reality of judgement for that time and for now.

James does not systematically address church order, although he does have comments about not showing partiality, not being many teachers, and not having wars and fights. Nor does he write about our differing gifts as members of the Body of Christ or give detailed instruction about our witness to the world, although the letter itself contains gospel appeals and warnings to unconverted readers. Rather, his letter is principally about living a day-to-day Christian life consistent with "the perfect law of liberty." In that sense, it does seem quite appropriate to compare James's letter with Proverbs.

God willing, I plan to explore the main themes in James in more detail in subsequent articles. For now, I find it interesting to compare the end of James's letter with the end of Psalm 119. Psalm 119 ranges widely over many aspects of God's Word, but in the final verse, the psalmist recognises his own weakness and tendency to go astray: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments" (Psalm 119:176). In a similar fashion, James covers a lot of ground regarding practical Christian living, but at the end, he encourages all those who can, to help someone who has wandered off, showing what a blessing that kind of patient, humble and gracious work can be. It is an encouraging way to end, and it is a reminder that the person who does live consistently with the "perfect law of liberty" is likely to be the kind of person who can turn "a sinner from the error of his ways."

Study Notes

- Take some time to read the whole Epistle of James; in one sitting if you can find time. This is a very good way to get a grasp of the structure and purpose of any Bible book.

A Fulfilled Life

David Pulman

A fulfilled life is not defined by being busy and active every moment of the day. It does not require unlimited wealth to supply my every need. A fulfilled life is a contented, satisfied, or indeed a happy life. My wife and I used to feel very satisfied when we arrived at the end of summer, and we had filled a freezer with a variety of soft fruits from our garden. However, the work required to achieve a freezer full of soft fruit could not be described as happy! Picking and processing the fruit was not pleasant; it was laborious and messy. But being satisfied in this way was relatively short-lived. The whole process had to be repeated the following year, and every year, for as long as we wanted soft fruit. Eventually there came a time when we decided that the effort outweighed the benefit, and the fruit bushes were uprooted and replaced with grass! We had done this a few years previously with our vegetable patch. The back-breaking toil and glut of vegetables were replaced by the purchase of sensible quantities from local shops!

In this article we will see that John chapters 15 to 16 show us how a permanently fulfilled life can be achieved. These chapters contain the Lord's last conversation with His disciples as He journeyed from celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives where He was betrayed. We will look specifically at two scriptures from John 15 and 16 under the headings: *Love and Obedience* and *Freedom to Ask*.

Love and Obedience

In John 15:9 we read, "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you." In this remarkable statement of the Lord, we see that the love of the Lord Jesus for those who believe on Him, is the same as the love that the Father has for His beloved Son! The Lord completed the statement by saying, "...abide [or remain] in My love." Remaining in the conscious enjoyment of divine love goes hand in hand with obedience. The opposite of obedience is rebellion. A rebel would not be happy staying close to the Lord. Therefore, John 15:10 is a word of encouragement

from the Lord's own lips, "...keep My commandments...". The Lord is our perfect example of obedience, and it is His desire that we should emulate Him. What was the Lord's intention in this? "That My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). Jesus wanted the disciples, and us, to permanently experience, the same joy that He had in being obedient to the Father. If we do this, then *our* joy will be full!

We can see the clear dependence on obedience. It raises the questions, "How much do I love the Lord Jesus?" and, "Am I ready to be fully committed to Him?" The alternative is to be a half-hearted, fair-weather Christian. The Lord Jesus never said that being a believer would be easy. John 16:33 states that we will have tribulation in this world. A fulfilled life is a life full of joy, which does not diminish in any way, no matter what the world throws at us. Nobody suffered like the Lord Jesus. Isaiah 53:3 states prophetically that He was the "Man of sorrows". But our Lord Jesus was not a sad Man; in fact, He was full of joy.

If we live this joyful life, where divine love is the normal daily experience, we will be ready to obey the Lord's next command to us, "That you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). There is no better way to show our love for the Lord, than by expressing that divine love towards other believers. This love is not dependent upon a response from the person loved. It is a love that is an act of will. It is a love that seeks the best for others regardless of the cost. I say this in the light of John 15:13, "No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends" (J. N. Darby Translation). We might never be called on to give our life for others, but there are many other ways of demonstrating our love to believers. Do we say unkind things about others, regardless of whether they are true or not? Do we look out for ways to be helpful, or are we so busy with our own things that we do not notice fellow believers in our local fellowship? Are we keen to support missionary endeavours thousands of miles away from home, but neglect the believer in the next street? Let us be challenged by the Lord's commandment, "...that you love one another..."

Love is not just saying nice things about each other; love must involve

acts of kindness. John 15:12b tells us how much we should love one another, it is, "...as I have loved you." To understand the magnitude of the Lord's love we must consider the cross. In John 15:14 the Lord says we are His friends. We often like to dwell on that statement. It gives us great comfort. Christians are the friends of the Lord Jesus. But the same verse goes on to say, "...if you do whatever I command you." Earlier we considered the necessity of being obedient to stay in the enjoyment of the Lord's love. Now obedience is linked to friendship, "You are my friends if...". We often like the benefits, but not the responsibilities that go with them! It is a great thing to be classed as a friend, especially of the Lord Jesus, which is why John 15:15 is so precious. The Lord could have kept us as His servants and that would have been marvellous. But the Lord has drawn us closer still, to be His friends!

John 15:16 says, "I chose you...that you should go and bear fruit." This takes us back to the beginning of the chapter where the Lord describes Himself as the True Vine and believers as the branches (John 15:1-8). So, what fruit do the branches bear? It is to show the features of Christ. Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit which should be seen in a Christian. There are nine features of that fruit, starting with love and ending with self-control.

In John 15:17, the Lord goes back to His previously stated command, "that you love one another". The Lord thought it important enough to repeat this command, so we should think very seriously about how we respond to it. We can only have a fulfilled life if we are fully in tune with our Lord and Saviour.

Freedom to Ask

We read in John 16:23-24, "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." In the first 22 verses of John 16, the Lord Jesus speaks of difficulties to come for believers, of the coming of the Spirit of God, of the Spirit's work in the world, and of the guiding support and help of the Spirit for the Lord's followers.

Also, the Lord speaks of His going away by way of the cross and the grave. But within a few days their sorrow would be turned to joy at the Lord's resurrection and ascension into glory. It is from this point, that the Lord Jesus now leads them into the secret of the freedom to ask the Father by prayer in the Lord's own name.

While the Lord Jesus was in this world, the disciples communicated with Him face to face. But once the Lord is absent a new channel of communication will be opened to them. The face to face will be replaced by believing prayer to the Father, whom they cannot see. Through faith in the work of Christ at the cross, we have been brought into a family relationship with God, and Jesus' Father is our Father. As the Lord Jesus said on the first resurrection morning, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17).

At first reading, the phrase, "Whatever you ask", seems to be like a blank cheque - we can ask for anything that we like. But we need to recognise the importance of the words, "In My name". This does not mean finishing every prayer with a few words such as, "This we ask in Your name Lord Jesus, Amen", although there is nothing wrong in closing a prayer in this way. The Lord's name relates to concepts such as authority, what the Lord Jesus would want, and what God the Father wants. In Acts 16:18, we see Paul commanding a demon to come out of a girl in the Lord's name, just as Jesus liberated people from demons during His ministry on earth. We must exercise the authority of the Lord's name with great care. It is not for our own selfish use. When the Lord was on earth, He did those things that pleased the Father. What does the Father want? On the mount of transfiguration, the Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5). The Father's desire is that the world should listen to His Son.

Prayer is a serious matter and not something to be rushed. There are different kinds of prayer: personal, family, church-fellowship, and so forth. These prayers may include: our own requests, intercession for others and worship. The last phrase in John 16:23 is "...He [the Father] will give you." Why are our prayers not always, apparently, answered? No doubt there are several reasons, including:

- We ask wrongly.
- The Father decides it is not the right time.
- The answer comes in a different way to what we thought.
- We are being encouraged to persist in prayer.

In John 16:24, the Lord repeats what has just been stated in John 16:23 but adds "...that your joy may be full." Full here means filled until there is room for nothing more! We should not doubt the Father's willingness to give! The Lord Jesus wants us to receive. There is a full joy to be experienced in asking and receiving. If there is a lack of joy, then the difficulty must be with us.

Two verses from 1 John give us some more help on this. "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22) and "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). John gives three important conditions for receiving answers. The first is "...because we keep His commandments..." (1 John 3:14). The second is "...do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22). The third is "...according to His will..." (1 John 5:14).

Keeping His Commandments: We have already linked love and obedience together. Keeping the Lord's commandments means living a godly life. It is not how / think I should live, or how other people think I should live, but what God has commanded in the Scriptures, especially in the New Testament.

Doing Those Things that Please God: We are not to live selfishly. We are to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in what we do.

According to His Will: How can we know the will of God? A few Scriptures will help us with this. "Do not be conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2). We are not to be moulded into the ways and thinking of the world. If we are, then we will become morally bankrupt and useless to God. "Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:6). What

are our motives in the workplace? Get as much as we can for as little effort as possible? “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). The will of God requires sexual purity for a Christian. “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (1 Peter 3:17). You might suffer for being a Christian even though you have done nothing wrong, but this is still the will of God.

Conclusion

Now we can summarise what a fulfilled life is! It is living the Christian life each day, knowing that God the Father finds pleasure in a life that displays those qualities and features that were perfectly seen in His Son, the Lord Jesus. This will involve us keeping the commandments of the Lord Jesus, doing those things that please the Father and living in the will of God. It will give us the wonderful freedom to approach the Father in Jesus’ name, knowing that when we ask, the Father hears us, and the right answer to our requests will come at just the right time!

Study Notes

- How do you think fulfilment and contentment in life can be achieved?
- If somebody today says, “You can be my friend if...”, we will probably be suspicious of them! How is it different when the Lord says it?
- The writer of this article says, “A fulfilled life is a life full of joy”. But he talks about the need for obedience in the same paragraph. Do you think obedience is compatible with joy? How?
- Make a list of unanswered prayers of your own. Think about whether any of the four reasons David mentions in this article apply to those prayers. The list is not definitive, you may be able to think of other reasons!

In the next edition of Scripture Truth...

James chapter 1

Yannick starts to take us in the detail of this immensely practical epistle with a look at the first chapter.

Hope

Jonathan follows on from the topic of Faith to consider the lovely subject of Hope.

Ruth chapter 2

Taking up the baton from Glenn Baxter, Peter Ollerhead considers the second chapter of this short, but compelling Old Testament book.

A Fruitful Life

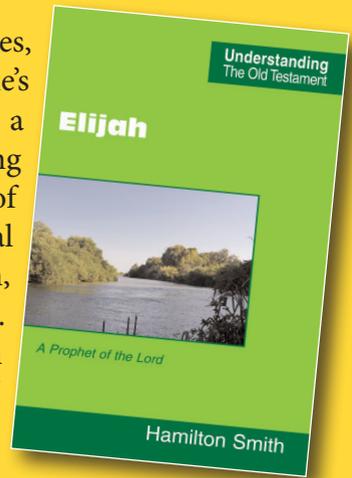
Paul Thomson follows on from David Pullman with an article looking at how God can use us in the world today.

**“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”
(Hebrews 3:18)**

The more observant among you will have noticed a few changes from Theo's last edition! The Word of God never changes, as He who is “The Word” does not change, but we should always strive to present it in ways that each generation can understand. There will be a few more changes to the style and format in future editions, but the mission of this magazine to faithfully expound and explain the Scriptures and, in doing so, to encourage and build up the people of God, will not be altering at all.

Elijah

Hamilton Smith (1862-1943), born in Barnes, Surrey, started work in the office of his uncle's building firm. By 1901, married and with a young family, he had retired from the building trade and entered full-time upon the task of building up the church of God. His personal ministry was delivered in the United Kingdom, but his written ministry is still read worldwide. His writings are brief, clear and very much to the point. This volume is one of a series of Old Testament character studies for which Hamilton Smith is probably best known.



This book traces the major events of the life of Elijah, with all the highs and lows in his work as a prophet. He knew only too well the inadequacies of his own humanity. But he knew the living God, was conscious of His presence, and was aware that prayer brought him into contact with the greatest power in the universe. By experience, he comes to understand that the God of creation, power and judgment, is supremely the God of grace. At each step, the author presents clear, practical lessons for Christians today as they too seek to present God's word with authority to an indifferent or antagonistic world.

Other books by the same author:

“The Lord is My Shepherd” and other papers

The Gospel of Mark: an Expository Outline

Elisha: the Man of God