

# Scripture Truth



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The forgiveness of sins:  
A dispensational history

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# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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## Why this waste?

“... a woman came to him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when his disciples saw it, they were indignant saying, ‘Why this waste?’” (Matthew 26:7-8, NKJV).

The Person of Christ is a stumbling-block to every unbeliever. A medical student I knew, who had professed conversion, was stumbled by the fact of Jesus’s accepting the woman’s extravagant devotion instead of diverting its value to the help of the poor. The student went on to live his working life as a GP in an impoverished northern industrial town, but he never (to my knowledge) truly came to Christ. The test of the rich young ruler, i.e., to benefit the poor and forsake all for Christ, was one thing. The test of Bethany was another. It displeased even the eleven, and emboldened Judas in his treachery (vv.14-16). The woman alone had the perception of love to foresee the death of her King.

Believers should be much concerned for the poor at home and abroad. But there is something beyond that. The Lord said to the rich young ruler, “Follow me” – not just “what I do”, but “*Me*”. Believers should be concerned about the care of the flock of God. But after the Lord had charged Peter with caring for His sheep He *added* the command to Peter, “Follow me” (John 21:19). Believers have been left in this world to bear witness to the gospel. But devotion to the Lord Himself comes first; though the fishing should follow (Matthew 4:19).

Many a Christian woman has lived a single life because she either never even considered marrying an unbeliever, or rejected the marriage proposal of some admirable, but unconverted, suitor. Why this waste? And what about “the service of silence” tendered by many Christian women week in, week out, in obedience to 1 Corinthians 14:34? Why this waste? Christ alone will estimate the true value of such “alabaster flasks”.

THEO BALDERSTON

# The Eagle

Yannick Ford

*A rare excursion for ST into natural history!*

*This article first appeared as a Truth for Today talk on Premier Radio –  
<http://www.truthfortoday.org.uk/home.html>.*

Have you ever seen an eagle in the wild? It is something I would love to see. Eagles are majestic, noble birds. Like lions, they are often found on flags and heraldry and national emblems – for example, in times past the eagle was the jealously-guarded emblem of each Roman legion, and modern-day examples include the bald eagle which is the national bird of the United States. Eagles are swift, far-sighted, and powerful – birds to be admired. They are also mentioned many times in the Bible. Or are they? The word used in the Old Testament is *nesher*, which is translated as “eagle” in our English Bibles. It is not absolutely clear what the identity of the *nesher* is – some think that it refers to another large and majestic bird, the griffon vulture. Back in 1867 H.B. Tristram published a book called *The Natural History of the Bible*. He outlines a number of reasons as to why the Bible bird *nesher* is the griffon vulture. I was interested to see the same identification of *nesher* in a Jewish website called “Zoo Torah” where the author, Rabbi Nosson Slifkin, says about the griffon vulture that “this spectacular bird has a wingspan that can measure eight feet and is the most magnificent bird of prey in Israel.” According to Tristram, the griffon vulture was the emblem and standard of Persia.

Be that as it may, and whether we think of a noble eagle or a magnificent griffon vulture, the verses that mention this bird give us some very precious insights into the character of God as our powerful Protector. In particular, I would like to consider one passage in Deuteronomy:

“For the LORD’s portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the LORD alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him” (Deuteronomy 32:9-12).

This passage brings to mind a beautiful picture of a caring parent-bird that protects and helps its young, whilst also teaching and developing them. What I would like to bring out in this article is that this picture is a picture of God’s care, and that we can, and we should, fully trust in God, for He has the power and the love and care to support us and protect us. We’re going to look at references to the eagle in the light of this proposition.



The first time that the eagle is mentioned in the Bible is in Exodus 19:4. The children of Israel had been brought out of Egypt and into the wilderness of Sinai. Moses was shortly about to receive the ten commandments from God. In verses 4 and 5 of Exodus 19 we read, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.” This is similar to the above passage in Deuteronomy. God is telling Moses that, just like a strong and caring parent-eagle, He has safely carried the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, and that He is bringing them into a relationship with Himself.

H.B. Tristram also writes about the eagles’ care for their young:

“The pains which all birds of prey take in encouraging their young ones to fly, and in coaxing them to leave the nest, are well known to all who have observed them. The account given by Sir H. Davy of his watching a pair of golden eagles thus occupied has been often quoted. ‘I once saw a very interesting sight above the crags of Ben Nevis. Two patient eagles were teaching their offspring, two young birds, the manoeuvres of flight. They began by rising from the top of the mountain, in the eye of the sun. It was about mid-day, and bright for the climate. They at first made small circles, and the young birds imitated them. They paused on their wings, waiting till they had made their flight, and then took a

second and larger gyration, always rising towards the sun, and enlarging their circle of flight, so as to make a gradually ascending spiral. The young ones still and slowly followed, apparently flying better as they mounted; and they continued this sublime exercise, always rising, till they became mere points in the air, and the young ones were lost, and afterwards their parents, to our aching sight.”<sup>1</sup>

If this is the care that, through instinct, parent eagles show their offspring, then how much more God’s care is for us! The illustrations of the eagle that God uses in His Word are there to teach us about His Fatherly care of us. A young bird will feel safe with a parent who has both the power and the instinct to protect and support. We can feel safe, too, knowing that this is what God is like.

Now of course the passages that we read in Exodus and Deuteronomy were primarily spoken to God’s people, Israel. Can we also take comfort in such expressions? Yes, we can. For a start, Romans 15:4 tells us that, “whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Not all of Scripture is about us, but all of it is for us in some sense, so we can be encouraged by this picture of God’s character in the Old Testament. The eagle, or the griffon vulture, would have been pretty much “the king of birds”, and so it is a fitting illustration of a powerful and protecting parent. In similar vein Romans 8:31 says that, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” and verses 38 to 39 of the same chapter say, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Most interestingly, we find the eagle in the Bible’s descriptions of God’s presence. The first verse of the prophet Ezekiel says, “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.” Ezekiel saw a vision of the throne of God itself, as if supported on a chariot, and surrounded by heavenly creatures that he simply calls “living creatures”. Verses 5 and 6 say “also from within [the bright cloud] came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings.” In verse 10 Ezekiel tells us about the faces of these living creatures: “as for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had

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<sup>1</sup> H.B. Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible* (London, 6<sup>th</sup> edn., 1883), p. 176.

the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle.”

Now what is also interesting is that we have a similar description right at the end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, which records what the apostle John wrote after he too had been given a vision of heaven. He says, “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne” (4:2). Then in verses 6-7 he says, “Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.”

Both Ezekiel and John saw living creatures that surrounded God’s throne, and they described them as having characteristics of a lion, a calf or an ox, a man, and an eagle. No doubt the lion, man, ox, and eagle each represent certain attributes of God. Since we are focussing on the eagle, let’s look at how the Bible characterises eagles.

We have already considered their care for their young. Another attribute that the Bible mentions is that they are swift. I will quote three passages from the Old Testament that illustrate this. Firstly, when David lamented the death of Saul and Jonathan he said, “Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions” (2 Samuel 1:23). Secondly, when Job was complaining about all his troubles, he said, “Now my days are swifter than a runner; they flee away, they see no good. They pass by like swift ships, like an eagle swooping on its prey” (Job 9:25-26). Thirdly, Jeremiah says, “Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains and lay in wait for us in the wilderness” (Lamentations 4:19). All these verses highlight the swiftness of the eagle. God is swift to help us, too:

“Praise Him for His grace and favour  
To our fathers in distress;  
Praise Him still the same for ever,  
Slow to chide, and swift to bless:  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Glorious in His faithfulness!”<sup>2</sup>

It’s a most encouraging thought – “slow to chide and swift to bless”.

We also find that the Bible speaks of the eagle’s excellent vision. If we go again to the book of Job, but this time with God speaking, we read concerning the

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<sup>2</sup> H.F. Lyte, 1834.

eagle, “Does the eagle mount up at your command, and make its nest on high? ...From there it spies out the prey; its eyes observe from afar. Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is” (39:27-30). Eagles are known to have good eyesight. We use the term “eagle-eyed” when we are speaking of sharp vision, or being able to spot things. According to the Wikipedia page for “eagle eye”, eagles could apparently spot something the size of a rabbit from two miles away! The point for us to take away is that God sees perfectly – He sees the end from the beginning, He sees the challenges that await us, He knows what we will need in our Christian pathway.

Another attribute of both eagles and griffon vultures is the heights that they inhabit. We saw this in the quote from Job just earlier: “Does the eagle mount up at your command, and make its nest on high? On the rock it dwells and resides, on the crag of the rock and the stronghold” There are various comments on the internet about Ruppell’s griffon vulture, presumably a similar bird to the Biblical *neshar*, as being a bird that can fly very high. A web page from the Smithsonian Zoo website mentions this bird as the highest flying bird on record, and it was apparently spotted in Africa at an altitude of over 37,000 feet – well over the height of Mount Everest! It is the sort of altitude at which planes fly! Eagles of course are also known to make their nests high up on rocky crags. Whatever the bird mentioned in the Bible is, whether eagle or griffon vulture, we have a good natural illustration of one dwelling on high – a good picture of our heavenly Father.

Not all the Bible references to eagles are so positive. The eagle was one of the birds that was not to be eaten under Jewish law (Leviticus 11:13). Aside from spiritual illustrations, this prohibition may well have been partly due to the fact that these birds ate carrion – especially if the bird referred to really is the griffon vulture. And in Luke 17:36-37, when the Lord Jesus was teaching about the last days, He said “Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.” The disciples asked the Lord where the other would be left, and He replied, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together”.

Notwithstanding these less positive references to the eagle’s character, it seems reasonable that it is the positive attributes of the eagle, or of the griffon vulture, which are meant to illustrate God’s care for us: His power, His concern for His own, His swiftness to help, His far-sightedness. Other animals in the Bible are also used in both positive and negative ways. For example, the raven in 1 Kings 17:6; and in Luke 12:24, “...for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?”



Summing up so far then, we can see that the eagle in the Bible gives us a beautiful picture of God's care. The eagle, like God, is powerful, swift, far-sighted, and cares for its own. As I said at the start, we can and we should fully trust in God, for He has the power and the love and care to support us and protect us.

Quite a few of these ideas come together in a beautiful passage in Isaiah. In chapter 40:27-31, we read,

“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God’? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

If we wait on the LORD, we too can become in some way like eagles. We will have our strength renewed. Just as the eagle soars on high, we too can “mount up with wings like eagles”, overcoming our problems through God's strength. I'd like to close by going back to that quote from Tristram's book about the parent eagles teaching their young, “The young ones... slowly followed, apparently flying better as they mounted; and they continued this sublime exercise, always rising, till they became mere points in the air...” Let's trust in God who will give us the strength to “mount up with wings like eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.”



# “...if I do not evangelise!”

Donald Hill

The book of the prophet Jonah, consisting of just four chapters and forty-eight verses, records for us the events which followed from the commission he received to deliver a message to the 120,000 inhabitants of Nineveh, the capital-city of Assyria. Not only does the book provide a historical account of these events, but it also has a message for you and me in the twenty-first century. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...” (2 Timothy 3:16, KJV). And, “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...” (Romans 15:4).

So what are the lessons we should learn from this famous Old-Testament book?

1. Jonah was instructed by God to go to Nineveh and speak to its inhabitants about their evil ways. Jonah, however, had other ideas. Instead of travelling north-east to Nineveh he elected to travel west down to Joppa, a port on Israel’s Mediterranean coast. His course thereafter continued downward – *down* into the ship once he had paid his fare, *down* on to a lower deck for a sleep, and, finally, *down* into the sea (Jonah 1:3-15). As soon as we move out of the will of God we are set on a downward course!

Jonah was disobedient, and disobedience brings discipline. Saul disobeyed and lost his throne; Moses disobeyed and didn’t enter the inheritance; David disobeyed and lost the child born to Bathsheba.

2. As a result, Jonah was not a good testimony to the heathen crew on the ship. He had to be awakened out of his sleep during the tempest and confess that he was running away from the responsibility that God had charged him with. Let us beware of seeking to escape from our responsibilities as believers!
3. The fact that Jonah failed to fulfil his calling and found himself entombed in the great fish suggests to us that Israel failed in their responsibility as a nation, and were punished by being taken into captivity. The ten northern tribes that comprised the kingdom still called “Israel” after the rupture of Solomon’s kingdom were the first to be taken captive – by the Assyrians – and dispersed among the “sea” of the nations (2 Kings 17:6). Then the two southern tribes that comprised the kingdom of Judah were taken to Babylon. Some of the latter returned for a rebuilding programme – Zerubbabel and some 42,000 others at the time of Cyrus’s decree; some

decades later a group led by Ezra the scribe; and lastly Nehemiah, who organised the rebuilding of the wall (Ezra, chs., 1, 7; Nehemiah 2). God had Christ in view, and Judah had to be back in the land for “Bethlehem Ephratah” to be the birthplace of Messiah (Micah 5:2). Jonah is therefore a picture of Israel’s failure – and restoration. Finally, following the rapture of the church, and during the seven years before the millennial kingdom is established, Jews will be awakened to the fact that they crucified their Messiah, and will go out with the gospel of the Kingdom to the nations – as Jonah eventually went to Nineveh.

4. What a God is ours! When cast overboard, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish specially on hand for his rescue. God has power over the animal kingdom! Lions’ mouths were closed when Daniel was thrown into their den; ravens fed Elijah at the brook Cherith – with meat! And the Lord Jesus rode on an ass not “broken in” in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
5. Inside the great fish, Jonah prayed as no doubt never before! Indeed, the words he used (2:2-9) reflect the feelings of the Lord Jesus when He suffered sinlessly at the hands both of sinful men, and of a holy, righteous, and sin-hating God; Psalm 69 contains comparable language. After three days spent in the fish (1:17), Jonah, in the ways of God, was delivered by the great fish on to dry land again. The Lord Jesus Himself referred the Pharisees to Jonah’s three days when they asked him for a sign (Matthew 12:38-40). As Jonah spent three days in the fish, so He would spend three days in the grave. “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins...But now is Christ risen from the dead”! (1 Corinthians 15:17, 20).
6. Having been taught a serious lesson, Jonah did not hesitate when “the word of the LORD came unto [him] the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh...” (Jonah 3:1-2). When the citizens heard the message that within forty days Nineveh would be overthrown, they fasted, repented, and wore sackcloth, the king himself being among the number who humbled themselves before God.

Today is still the “day of grace” and of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). As ambassadors for Christ we are left in this world to beseech men, women, and children, “Be reconciled to God” (5:20). Right now, God commands all men everywhere to repent, “because he has set a day in which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has appointed, giving proof of it to all, in having raised him from among the dead” (Acts 17:31, Darby Trans.). Some may mock; others prevaricate. But are *we* ready to carry this message?

7. Jonah was displeased and angry when the people of Nineveh repented and escaped judgment. He requested that he might die (Jonah 4:1-8). He built a booth, or shelter, for himself, and waited and watched to see the outcome of his message. God provided Jonah with a gourd to shield him from the scorching sun, and then sent a worm to destroy it. Jonah pitied the gourd that had shrivelled up, but did not understand the pity of God for the great city of Nineveh. Jewish leaders were angry when the gospel was preached at and after Pentecost, and Jewish believers were not pleased to hear that Peter had taken the gospel to the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts chapters 2 – 4, 11). (The latter relented, however, when Peter was able to persuade them that it was all of God.)

As believers, we have the light of God concerning sin, salvation, and the judgment that is His “strange work” (cp. Isaiah 28:21, KJV). God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should turn to Him and live (2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 18:32). Am I like Jonah, running away from my responsibilities; or like the apostle Paul who, knowing the terror of the Lord, persuaded men? (2 Corinthians 5:11) “For though I [lit.] evangelise, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I [lit.] do not evangelise!” (1 Corinthians 9:16)

Halting at traffic lights in a seaside resort, I was confronted by four Bible texts side by side on a church notice-board. Drivers, passengers on buses, and pedestrians on the busy street could not miss the various messages! Some labour assiduously in producing the *Alive!* magazine; tracts are readily available; and there are those who are capable of writing and producing their own gospel leaflets for distribution. We will of course all do it in different ways, whether pre-planned, or as opportunity arises. There comes a time when age brings its own limitations, but aged saints can pray, and thus join in “the fellowship of the gospel”! (Philippians 1:5)

Jonah needed a shock and a wake-up call! Do I?

“Sinners are perishing round us to-day,  
Heedlessly treading the broad downward way,  
Travelling on to eternity’s shore,  
God’s gospel story will reach them no more.

*Oh, won’t somebody tell them,  
Tell them of Calvary’s tree;  
Tell them the story of Jesus,  
What a great Saviour is He.”*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L.H. Farrell; W.G. Poole (*chorus*).

# The judgment seat of Pilate

George Stevens

*The first in a two-part series*

Have you ever experienced a dream that expressly gave you a warning in relation to yourself or to someone else? The wife of Pontius Pilate did. In Matthew 27:19 we read: “When he [Pilate] was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man [Jesus]: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him” (KJV). Regretfully, her husband did not act upon her warning.

The Greek word for “judgment seat” is *bēma*. It literally means “foot-room”. It was originally used to denote a raised place or platform. The word was later applied to the tribunal of a Roman magistrate or ruler.

## A death sentence

In this article, we will examine the events that led to Pilate sitting in judgment upon Christ, as they are listed in Luke 23:1-25.

Verses 1-2 state, “And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.”

The crowd mentioned in the verse above was composed of the elders of the people, the chief priests, and the scribes who had come together (see 22:66). Previously they had led Christ to their council. There He had claimed to be the Son of God. So in their anger, they led Him to Pilate. They believed that the Law of Moses said that, for such blasphemy, Jesus should die. At that time only Pilate could pass that sentence because Israel was under Roman governance (cp. John 18:31).


These Jews, who were angered by the Roman yoke and prone to rebellion, were prepared to pretend a measure of loyalty to their conquerors in order to be rid of Jesus. This pretence was a minor matter compared to the greatness of their unbelief. They denied Christ as their own Messiah despite being aware of the many scriptures that predicted His coming into the world to suffer, bleed, and die.

## Accusations

The charges they brought against Him (Luke 23: 2,5) were mostly false. Rather than bringing perversity to the nation, Jesus had sought to bring moral and spiritual stability to it. When asked about giving tribute to Caesar, He had

taught that they should render to Caesar the things that were Caesar's and to God the things that were God's (20:21ff). In Mark 14:62 the Lord Jesus had confessed He was the Christ, the Son of God before the high priest. Although He was the Christ and therefore the King of the Jews, the time of His kingdom had not yet come: when the people had tried to make Him their king, He had departed from them (John 6:15).

Furthermore, when Pilate asked Him if He was the King of the Jews (Luke 23:3), He said, "Thou sayest it." In other words, "Yes" (compare Matthew 26:25). The Lord acknowledged the fact that He was the King of the Jews. At the same time, we read in John 18:36 that He said His kingdom was not of this world. He was here witnessing a good confession and was prepared to accept the consequences.

  
*Jesus said,  
"Thou  
sayest it."  
In other  
words,  
"Yes"*

Pilate did not seem too concerned about this because it was a Jewish issue.

We are called to walk in the steps of Jesus whatever the consequences of doing so may be. However, we hold on to the promise that, one day, we shall not only be with Him, but we shall also reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12a).

### **Not guilty!**

In Luke 23:4 Pilate turned to the chief priests and to the people, and declared, "I find no fault in this man". How could He be at fault? He did no sin, knew no sin and there was no sin to be found in Him! (1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5)

Pilate's statement made Christ's accusers angry, and they became more animated (Luke 23:5). In their ranting they mentioned that Jesus began His teaching in Galilee. The latter was the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas. Pilate saw an opportunity to offload the problem, and he sent Jesus to Herod, who was in Jerusalem at the time.

## Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and hence an Idumean (Edomite), was an adulterer and murderer. He held puppet-rule over Galilee and Peraea. He had married a daughter of Aretas, the king of Nabataea in northern Arabia, but subsequently persuaded Herodias, the wife of Philip his own half-brother, to leave her husband and live with him. Already Jesus had referred to Herod as “that fox” because he was both cunning and destructive (13:32).

In 23:8-10 we read that Herod had desired (for a long time) to see this Jesus of whom he had heard so much. He hoped to see some miracle done by Him. He questioned Him vigorously, but Jesus gave him no reply. The silence of Jesus must have turned the initial delight of Herod to shame. Here is an occasion where Jesus was as a sheep before its shearer – dumb. He opened not His mouth (Isaiah 53:7). On the other hand, the chief priests and scribes never ceased their accusations.

The result was that Herod with his men of war set Jesus at nought (Luke 23:11). They mocked Him, and teased and harassed the Son of God as if He were a village fool. Finally, they cast a splendid robe about Him. The robe was a radiant one, the kind worn by people in high office. They then sent Him back to Pilate. One day, if unrepentant, these same people will stand before Jesus and He will be their judge.

## Predicted Sufferings

Overall, we see the sufferings of Jesus at the hands of men as predicted in Psalm 22, including:

- unsympathetic people! “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head...” (v.7).
- those in high authority! “Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion” (vv.12-13).



*The silence  
of Jesus  
must have  
turned the  
initial  
delight of  
Herod to  
shame.*



- both Gentiles and religious Jews! “For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet” (v.16a).
- Satan! “Save me from the lion’s mouth...” (v.21).

### Friends


That same day Pilate and Herod (who had been enemies previously) made friends (Luke 23:12). They combined in order to deal with the problems presented by Christ. Both had come to the same conclusion relative to the judgment of Jesus, namely, He had done nothing worthy of death (vv.14-15).

### Appeasement

Pilate called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and declared Jesus’ innocence (vv.13-16). The charges of the people had been proved to be fictitious. Pilate should really have released Jesus at that point if justice was to be served, but, unrighteously, he went on to say that he would chastise him and then release him. He was willing to concede some minor form of punishment to please the people. Nonetheless he was anxious to release the Prisoner.

Verse 17 shows that it was the custom to release a prisoner at this time of Passover. Little did the Jews realise that Christ was the Lamb of God. Today, we know that Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. In the first part of verse 18 the crowd “screamed” for the rejection of Jesus. We are reminded of Isaiah 53:3, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

In the rest of the verse 18 they demanded the release of Barabbas. The Jews were condemned by God because of this cry! This is confirmed by Acts 3:13-15, “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy

  
*Pilate and Herod had come to the same conclusion, namely, Jesus had done nothing worthy of death.*





One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.”

### Barabbas

The name “Barabbas” means “son of abba” or, “son of a father”. The Jews had the opportunity to choose “*a* son of *a* father” or “*the* Son of *the* Father”. Barabbas was a rebel and a murderer (Luke 23:19). He was preferred to Jesus! Such was the choice of man!

The word “sedition”, or “insurrection”, in verse 19 means, “raising opposition to the government” in order to throw off its yoke and, as a free people, to assert their own liberties. Barabbas had chosen this path! Elsewhere, this man is called a robber, i.e., a violent criminal. The crowd preferred him to the Man who “had done no violence, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:9).

### Crucify Him!

In verses 20-21 we see that Pilate wished to release Jesus. He addressed them again in hope of this; but the cry of the Jews was vehement and continuous, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Would the power of the people or the power of Rome prevail?

In the first part of verse 22 we read, “And he [Pilate] said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him.” He went on to repeat, “I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.” In order to appease the people, Pilate said he would discipline Him and then release Him. It didn’t work!

### A travesty of justice

Verse 23 shows that the voices of the crowd and the chief priests prevailed. Their voices were overpowering! So much so, Pilate gave in. Verses 24-25 make for sad reading, “And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.”

Thus the world was proved guilty before God! The people who had the Law fell under its curse (cp. Deuteronomy 27:13ff), not merely because they were disobedient to its requirements, but, worst of all, because they were determined to have their own Messiah put to death. This, when the Gentile, Pilate, had originally sought to release Him. And Pilate himself, it seems, was ultimately swayed by the priests’ taunt, “If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s

friend” (John 19:12). “The friendship of the world is enmity against God” (James 4:4).

In Matthew 27:24 we read, “When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.” Here Pilate calls Jesus “just”. He realised He was righteous. This made his own guilt in sentencing Him to death even greater! Washing his hands would not make him innocent of Jesus’ blood. He should have listened to the warning from his wife and the judgment of his own heart. Instead, moved by fear, He failed to do the right thing. The people replied with the awful words, “His blood be on us and on our children.”

### The flawed judgment-seat

The judgment seat of Pilate was flawed! Justice and judgment were overturned by

- the religious leaders stirring up the people
- Pilate’s fear of the people
- Pilate’s desire not to lose the confidence of Caesar; and
- a desire for a temporary peace at any price.

There was no real fear of God throughout! We read in Psalm 19:9, “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether”; and in Psalm 33:8: “Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.” How opposite were the actions of the people and of Pilate to “great David’s” own words, “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God” (2 Samuel 23:3), words which will be at last fulfilled in the One they crucified.

In regard to the unjust treatment of Jesus, God has given His answer. Philippians 2:9-12 reads,

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

One day those who believe will all stand at another *bēma*, another judgment-seat. “For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). This, God willing, will be the subject of another article.

# Major themes in John 17

## The Son speaking to the Father

David Anderson

*This article repays re-reading and prayerful reflection.*

My earlier article on John 17<sup>1</sup> was entitled, “The Lord’s prayer for His own”, and was derived from a *Truth for Today* broadcast. Recent local-assembly Bible Readings on John’s Gospel provided me with the opportunity for further reviews of my notes, which resulted in these further meditations on this unique “prayer”.

### The Son speaks to the Father

As God the Son who is co-equal with God the Father, the Lord always *asked* His Father whenever He “prayed”. This is a point worth reflecting on, and it characterises John 17. The ESV uses “ask” in verses 15 & 20, but “pray” in verse 9, to translate the one Greek word, “*erōtaō*”. On this word W. E Vine wrote,

“*Erōtaō* (ἐρωτάω, 2065<sup>2</sup>) more frequently suggests that the petitioner is on a footing of equality or familiarity with the person whom he requests.... In this respect it is significant that the Lord Jesus never used *aiteo* in the matter of making request to the Father. The consciousness of His equal dignity, of His potent and prevailing intercession, speaks out in this, that, as often as He asks, or declares that He will ask anything of the Father, it is always *erōtaō*, an asking, that is, upon equal terms (cp. John 14:16; 16:26; 17:9, 15, 20).”<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, I conclude that in John 17 the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the Father as His equal even though John used His personal name, Jesus (the unique Man), in verse 1.

The three parts of John 17 can be summarised in these terms:

1. In verses 1-5, the Son asked the Father regarding Himself.
2. In verses 6-19, the Son asked the Father regarding the apostles.
3. In verses 20-26, the Son asked the Father regarding all Christian believers.


What follow are the major themes of that wonderful, intimate prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> *Scripture Truth*, July 2015.

<sup>2</sup> “2065” is a link to Strong’s *Concordance*, added by the editors of Vine’s dictionary (see next footnote).

<sup>3</sup> W.E.Vine, M.F.Unger, & W. White, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Nelson, 1996). The quote within the quote is from R.C. Trench’s *New Testament Synonyms* (London, c.1855) section 40.



*Through  
Jesus  
Christ His  
Son, God is  
now  
known in  
the reality  
of His  
nature*



## The Father

Throughout chapters 13 - 17, the Lord emphasised to His disciples that their new relationship was to be with *God the Father* (see esp. 20:17). Twice over in chapter 17 He refers to the Name of “Father” *as the Name He had especially been given to make known to His disciples* (vv.11 & 12, ESV). In the revelation of the Name of “Father” the Godhead’s eternal relationships – those in which the Father and the Son subsist – were made known to them. In Scripture the name of a person describes that person’s character.<sup>4</sup> But the Name of a Person of the Godhead describes who He is in His Being. Through Jesus Christ His Son, God is now known in the reality of His nature, as this Gospel announces in its introduction: “The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has [fully] declared Him” (1:18, NKJV).

Six times in chapter 17 the Son directly addressed the Father, if in slightly different modes of address:

- “Father” (vv. 1, 21 & 24). As Son, He spoke directly to His Father in the intimacy and affection of His eternal relationship with Him.
- “O Father” (v.5, NKJV) or, “Thou Father” (Darby’s *New Trans.*). He emphatically spoke to His Father as His equal within the Godhead.
- “Holy Father” (v.11). He was conscious that the apostles (and ourselves) had (have) been called out of an unholy and sinful world, but were (are) to continue to live in it. As saints, all believers need to be practically separate from it.
- “Righteous Father” (v.25). His assessment of the world was that it was unrighteous in its treatment of both the Father and Himself (see 15:21-25) and that this would be on-going with believers.

According to 17:3, eternal life is to know the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ His Sent One. This definition distinguishes the relationship of

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., 1 Samuel 25:25, “For as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him.”

present-day saints with God from that of saints of other dispensations. They too knew or will know God, and thereby possessed or will possess a life which never ends. But in 17:3, the definite article that in the original precedes “eternal life” has the effect of throwing the emphasis on the adjective “eternal”,<sup>5</sup> thereby showing the nature (i.e., the character, quality) of this intimate family relationship of these children *with their Father*. “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” (1John 5:20, ESV).

### Love

As just said, to reveal that God is Father is to reveal that God is love. In John 13–17 the revelation of the Name of “Father” includes that reality of eternal love which is proper to the divine relationship of the Father and the Son. The Son can always speak to His Father as His equal because He eternally dwells [abides] in the Father’s bosom (1:18). His “asking in prayer” climaxes with the disclosure that this same blessedness and intimacy of affection (i.e., the Father’s love), which He Himself experiences / enjoys, is also the everlasting portion of His people! (17:26) Moreover, the Father’s love for Him from before the foundation of the world is the reason why He was able to make His demand / request that they be with Him where He is (17:24).

### Give / gave / given

*Love gives.* Believers are familiar with the idea that God’s giving is an action of His love. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (3:16).

This love-in-giving is expressed many times in chapter 17:

- The Father gives to His Son because He eternally loves Him and trusts Him with everything that He has given Him (vv.2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 22 & 24).
- The Son gives many things to His disciples because the Father has gifted them to Him (vv.2, 8 & 22).

### Those given to the Son by the Father

We are the Father’s love-gift to His Son. John described the characteristics of the people who believed in the Son in various ways throughout his Gospel. By belief in the true Light they are “the children of God”, children who were “born of God”, and so part of His family (1:12-13). In 6:39-40, 44-45 & 54 their eternal security is guaranteed. Jesus re-emphasised this fact in chapter 10, when He called them “my own” (v.14) and “my sheep” (v.27); and that there is a double

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<sup>5</sup> Lit., “*The eternal life.*” See Darby Trans. and note. The same form is also used in 1 John 1:2 (ESV, RV, Darby Trans.) and in 1 Timothy 6:12 (ESV).

security in the fact that they belong to both His Father and Himself (vv.28-30). And 6:37 identifies them as “all that the Father gives me”.

At the beginning of the Upper-Room Discourse, they are called, “his own”. They are “His own” because the Father gave them to Him; and “...having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (13:1). The footnote for this verse in Darby’s *New Translation* states that “the full force of this expression [i.e. the end]... [does not refer] merely to time; ...going through with everything is... implied.” His love for them (and us) endures – unto the end or to the uttermost, that is, through everything in this life upon earth and into eternity!

This love also involved “giving” to them – above all, the manifestation to them of the Father’s Name - “I have manifested your name to the people<sup>6</sup> whom you gave me....” (17:6, ESV).

To manifest is *to show forth* - He *had* displayed the Father to them in His Person, in His words, and in His deeds (14:8-11). But He also committed Himself to *continuing* (from heaven) to proclaim / declare / tell forth the Father’s name to them – and us (17:26 with 20). This is done through the witness borne by the apostles:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1John 1:1-4).

## The Word

Those given to the Son by the Father are in turn entrusted with making known the Father’s word. In the foregoing quotation from John’s first epistle the Son Himself is “the Word of life” who has been manifested to us through the apostles. Therefore in John 17:6 the Father’s “word” given by the Son to the apostles can also be thought of as the Son Himself, “the Word of life”, who is both the Word (1:1) and the Truth (14:6). If we “keep the Father’s word” (17:6) the truth becomes the means by which we are practically sanctified from the world for the Father’s use (17:17). In verse 8, however, it is the Father’s “words” that have been given to them. This is a different word for “words”, and is nuanced as “the divine communications” in the footnote to Darby’s *New Translation* – all the thoughts

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<sup>6</sup> These “people” were the eleven male apostles present with Him in the Upper Room that night. But they were representative of all the people who believed in Him during His public ministry. Nowadays, all Christian believers are included in this exclusive group of mankind (v.20).

of His heart about, and His desires for, His Son. And these, says verse 8, have been disclosed to believers. Finally, to equip them for representing Him in the world (cp. v.18 with 20:21), and thus serving Him, they have the Father's "word" (v.14). In this verse the "word" is "the word of God in testimony" (footnote in Darby's New Tr.).

### The World

What is said about "the world" in John 17 is the antithesis of all that the prayer has said concerning the relation between the Father and the Son, the revelation of the Father, and our being the Father's gift to His Son. As I stated in my former article, there are nineteen occurrences of the word "world" in chapter 17. Sometimes in John's Gospel (such as in 1:9-10) "the world" means planet earth on which we live; and the final occurrence of "world" in 1:10 obviously means the people who live on earth; similarly in 3:16.

However, the usage of "the world" throughout the Upper Room Discourse (chs.13 - 17) means more than just its people. It takes on the meaning of "the entire system of life of mankind who always act contrary to, and against, God and His will; who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who practice ungodliness." In fact, the world is in active rebellion against the Father and it has shown its hatred for Him (15:24)! Because the Son knew that its hatred would be directed towards the people given to Him He specifically asked that believers be kept from its powerful and corrupting influences (vv.15-17).

He also asked for believers to be kept in the good of the Father's Name, because any love for the world as a system practically precludes us from experiencing the love of the Father (cp. 1 John 2:15-17). However the Father's love is that all-compelling and overwhelming power which dispels the love we naturally have for the world!


### Glory / glorify

But the ultimate object of the prayer is glorification. To understand much of what the Son asked for, we




*If we  
"keep the  
Father's word"  
the truth  
becomes  
the means  
by which  
we are  
practically  
sanctified*





*The  
ultimate  
object  
of the  
prayer  
is  
glorification*



need to know the meaning of these two words and those associated with them.

- “Glory” is the display of excellence. In chapter 17 it signifies the manifested qualities of the Father and of the Son. That is, the resplendent majesty, great fame, utter holiness, utter love, beauty, dignity, exaltedness, together with the esteem, high honour, exaltation, and all-varied tributes of praise and worship that these attributes demand.
- “To glorify” is to cause the true excellences of a person to be manifested, seen, and understood and appreciated by others.

Therefore the intent of the Son’s asking in John 17 could be considered in three ways corresponding to the three sections of the prayer identified at the start of this article:

1. That the Father be glorified in / by the Son (vv.1-5).
2. That the Son be glorified in / by believers (vv.6-19).
3. That believers be glorified in / with the Son (vv.20-26).

In these three sections we discover various glories:

1. Jesus’ glory as Son, but also now as Man, seated at God’s right hand (v.1).
2. The Father’s on-going glory because His Son gives eternal life to believers (vv.1-3).
3. The Father’s glory brought to Him through the completed work of His Son on earth (v.4).
4. The personal Godhead-glory of the Son (v.5).
5. The moral glory of the Lord Jesus reflected in His disciples as they live in this world (v.10).
6. The glory which believers have been given by the Son to enable them to testify properly to Him (v.22).
7. The Son’s own heavenly glory (vv.5, 24).



# The forgiveness of sins

## A dispensational history (I)

**T. Balderston**

One day not quite two thousand years ago, in a small, overcrowded room in Capernaum, there were uttered among the sweetest words ever spoken. “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9:2, RV). The Son of man had “power [i.e., authority] on earth to forgive sins, as He immediately proved (v.10). The scribes present indeed knew their Bibles. They were right to say that in the OT the divine prerogative of forgiveness is never delegated to man (v.7). Neither Pharaoh’s nor Saul’s hopes in this regard were realized (Exodus 10:17; 1 Samuel 15:25). But here was One who could not only claim, but also prove, His authority before their eyes! What a wonderful day that was in the history of the world!

And forgiveness has its own history that deepens our sense of the wonder of it.

Forgiveness only appears in Genesis in terms of the person-to-person forgiveness besought of Joseph by the eleven brothers after the death of their father (50:17). The forgiveness of God does not appear on the pages of Scripture until Exodus 32:32, as something Moses pleaded with God for on behalf of the guilty nation that had persuaded Aaron to fashion the golden calf.

The LORD had borne Israel out of Egypt to Himself “on eagles wings” in order to make them “a peculiar treasure” to Himself from out of all peoples, and a “kingdom of priests”, i.e., a kingdom exercising a priestly function in relation to the peoples of the earth. Another way of saying this is that they were to be “a holy nation”; and this entailed their obedience to His commandments (Exodus 19:4-6). Even before they had heard any of the ten commandments and the three chapters of annexed “judgments” (Exodus 20 – 23), the people had glibly assented, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (19:8); and they reiterated the same assent immediately after hearing the exacting terms laid on them (24:3). *They didn’t know themselves.* Moses had only to be absent for not quite six weeks up the mountain for them to break the first two commandments in the most flagrant manner possible (32:1ff). The premise of their future blessing, namely, that they would be a holy people, had been negated within six weeks of its being divinely announced.

This is where forgiveness first overtly enters the Bible. The people had sinned the most serious sin of all; nothing could undo that fact. In Exodus 32:21 Moses’ offer to be blotted out of God’s book instead of the nation being consumed was rejected as insufficient (32.31ff). But Moses’ request, “Show me thy glory” (33:18), was granted.

And as the living God “passed by” Moses in “the cleft of the rock,” and Moses saw “the backparts” of His glory, the LORD both proclaimed His Name, and elucidated it for the first time in terms of His being the God of forgiveness:

“The LORD, the LORD, a God full of compassion, and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy [steadfast love, ESV] and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin: and that will be no means clear [the guilty]; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children...” (34:6-7).

God had already revealed His compassions for His covenant people when He had first arrested Moses at the burning bush (3:1-9). Subsequently, once Moses had returned to Egypt and been roughly dismissed by Pharaoh, God had revealed His Name and His covenant engagements to His people (6:2-8). But now they had “deeply revolted” from Him (cp. Isaiah 31:6). Yet again He revealed His Name, and His unchanged compassion, but now, necessarily, also His *forgiveness*.

So: in proclaiming His Name in Exodus 34:6f the LORD firstly revealed Himself as a God of compassion. From some elementary concordance-work this seems to be the first appearance of this word in the Scriptures in reference to God: for the force of it see Psalm 78:38. (The two appearances of the equivalent word in the NT are Luke 6:36 & James 5:11).

The second characteristic of the revelation is that the LORD is “gracious”; the force of this can be seen in its first appearance – Exodus 22:27. He is also “slow to anger”, a word making its first OT appearance here, though one could certainly say it characterised His attitude towards failing humanity before the Flood (Genesis 6:3). “Steadfast love” speaks of the LORD’s constant kindness towards his covenant people; and “truth” denotes His faithfulness to the terms of His covenant promises.

But though “steadfast love” and “truth” both also occur in Genesis, never before Exodus 34:6 had God been characterised as “*plenteous* in steadfast love and truth”. He would have to be “plenteous” in them if He was to continue with a chosen people that had so sorely sinned.

If we consider the combination of these words in Exodus 34:6 we must marvel at the revelation of the heart of God that was occasioned by the sin of His people. It is worth diverting to notice briefly that Jonah recognises (reluctantly) these same qualities in God’s dealings with Nineveh: “for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy [i.e., steadfast love<sup>1</sup>], and repentest thee of anger” (4:2). Jonah’s affirmation confirms that Exodus 34:6 does not just describe an attitude that God *assumed* in dealing

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<sup>1</sup> If there is the thought of covenantal kindness here (as many of the OT occurrences of this word suggest), the reference will be to the Noahic covenant (Genesis 9:9ff).

with His covenant people. It describes His heart. There was a partial revelation of the heart of God in Exodus 34:6, following the sin of the golden calf; one which, within the limits of the dispensation of Law, foreshadowed the far fuller and complete revelation of His heart in the cross.

Then we read (34:7), “keeping mercy [“steadfast love”] for thousands.” There is an echo here of the words in the third commandment (20:6). But after the golden calf Israel could no longer be called “thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments”. It is significant, therefore, that these moral qualifications are not predicated of the “thousands” in Exodus 34:7.

And so it is presumably concerning these “thousands” (cp. Numbers 10:36, etc.) that the next words are written, “forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin: and that will by no means clear [the guilty].” Moses’ prayer of 32:31ff is answered, not by Moses’s own substitutionary death, but *forgiveness*. But a further clause is added. The words, “the guilty”, are said not to be in the original, and so it is probable that we should not read this section to refer to two groups, i.e., firstly the forgiven and secondly the guilty. Rather, the forgiven and the “not cleared” are the same people, the people of Israel, who are both forgiven (in the first instance, forgiven the sin of the golden calf), and hence not rejected as the chosen people; but who also are the “not cleared”, of whom three thousand fell in one day, and others were smitten by the LORD (32:28, 35).

This encapsulates the history of Israel from that time forward. Only about a year later Moses had to invoke the terms of the LORD’s Self-revelation in Exodus 34 when Israel rejected the spies’ testimony (Numbers 14:1-4). Their rebellion and desire to return to Egypt brought on them the word that the LORD had spoken shortly after Sinai concerning the angel whom He would send to lead them into the land: “Take ye heed of him, and hearken unto him; provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him” (Exodus 23:20-21). Therefore the LORD now said that He would disinherit Israel and make of Moses a





*The Lord  
firstly revealed  
Himself as a  
God of  
compassion*



*The second  
characteristic  
of the  
revelation is  
that the Lord  
is “gracious”*



  
*The Lord  
is slow  
to anger  
and  
plenteous  
in mercy,  
forgiving  
iniquity  
and  
transgression*  


greater nation (Numbers 14:12). How was Moses *again* to intercede for them with God? Firstly he pleaded the dishonouring of LORD's Name before the nations if He seemed to be unable to bring into the land the people in whose midst He dwelt in cloud and fire (vv.13-16).

But then Moses pleaded that same Name as the LORD had revealed it after the golden calf.

“The LORD is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and that will by no means clear [the guilty]: visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children... Pardon, I pray thee, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of thy mercy, and according as thou has forgiven this people from Egypt even until now” (vv. 18-19).

The result of this pleading of the LORD's own Name was that the LORD said, “I have pardoned, according to thy word. But in very deed, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD; because all those men which have seen my glory... have not hearkened to my voice; surely, they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers” (vv.20-23). So here we see the “forgiving and not clearing” in action. The people as a whole was forgiven and remained in covenant relationship with God; the individuals were judged. The reason for judging the individuals was that the earth be filled with the glory of the LORD (14:21). The very glory on which basis Moses pleaded for forgiveness was also the basis for the judgment pronounced on the entire adult wilderness generation. God's name was involved: could He be disregarded with impunity by His own disobedient people? God is God, and we can distil from the accounts of the golden calf and the refusal of the spies that it was impossible, for His own glory, to simply forgive without registering the enormity of apostasy from the living God. Do we not have to acknowledge a moral rightness in this? However the main accent falls on the melodious words, “forgiving iniquity”. We may say, paradoxical as it may sound, that the dispensation of the Law *had to be* accompanied forgiveness. At the end of his long

life Joshua confronted the people regarding “whom they would serve”, and he warned them to consider the seriousness of the choice and the holiness of the LORD. Echoing Exodus 20:5 & 23:21, he said, “Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God: he is a jealous God: he will not forgive your transgression nor your sins” (Joshua 24:19). This echoes the second commandment: “...thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them nor serve them, for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...” The book of Judges is the record of the people’s miserable performance and repeated abandonment to the hands of their enemies. But it is also the record of their repentance, God’s compassionate relenting, and repeated deliverance. In short, every time the people turned to idolatry, they had to be forgiven.

Nonetheless: every time the people failed and made a fresh start, it was a fresh start in the covenant of Law, and they remained under its curses (Deuteronomy 27:13ff). The people under the Law were under a long test that abundantly showed what the heart of man is (Romans 3:10-19). But for this to be so, forgiveness had also to be central to God’s relationship with Israel throughout its troubled OT history. The theme of Solomon’s great prayer of dedication of his new temple was that it be a place where God would hear His people’s cries for His forgiveness after failure (1 Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39). Solomon also prayed that, if through unfaithfulness they forfeited the land, God would forgive them even in the land of their exile and bring them back (v.50). But forgiving also involved “not clearing”. This seems to be the force of the statement in Isaiah 40:2 that Jerusalem “hath received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins” (cp. Jeremiah 16:18).

In this connexion something else must be noticed. The tabernacle and temple sacrifices atoned for sins of ignorance but not for sinning “with a high hand” or “presumptuously” (Numbers 15:24-30; Psalm 19:13). For “sins of ignorance” the sacrifices brought forgiveness (e.g. Leviticus 4:20, 31). But Israel’s repeated apostasies were “with a high hand”; this is how (unsurprisingly) the Scriptures always implicitly treat them. And as to the penalty for apostasy, see Deuteronomy 17:2-6. Though temple sacrifices were often offered as part of Israel’s penitence, they did not, as it were, suffice for forgiveness. It had to be, as Nehemiah said in his great prayer, “...in thy manifold mercies [that] thou didst not make a full end of them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God” (9:31). Forgiveness for *witting* sins was not, so to speak, “built into” the dispensation of Law. Every time it had to be sought afresh, and pronounced afresh in the sovereignty of the God to whom belong the “secret things” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

On the basis of Exodus 34:6-7 the individual Israelite, too, could plead the LORD’s Name when praying for His forgiveness. “For thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great” (Psalm 25:11). He could plead the

  
*Thou,  
O Lord,  
art a God full  
of  
compassion  
and gracious,  
slow  
to anger,  
and plenteous  
in mercy and  
truth*



compassion of God. Echoing Exodus 34:6-7, David said, “But thou, O LORD, art a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth...” (Psalm 86:15). But the “not clearing” element also applied to individuals. Concerning Moses and Aaron Psalm 99:8 says, “Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their doings”. Of course their eternal salvation was inviolate; we can confirm this from Matthew 17:3. But neither the glory of the cross nor the consequent heavenly hope were then revealed, and so, for the public glory of the LORD’s Name, neither Moses nor Aaron could share in the supreme blessing of His covenant – possession of the Land.

However one more thing should also be noticed. So far as I can see, the forgiving of sins in the OT was almost always of specific sins, or an identifiable collection of past sins. There is only rarely a forgiveness of all sins that does not refer to a collection of identifiable past sins. Such an exception is, however, Psalm 103:

“Bless the LORD... who forgiveth all thine iniquities... The LORD is full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy... He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us after our iniquities. For... as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgression from us” (vv.2,3,8,10,12)

In this psalm the pattern of “forgiving and not clearing” is not found. The quotation speaks of simple forgiveness of all iniquities.” Here “all” to my mind means, “iniquities as a category” and not just “all iniquities to date”. In being healed of his illness Hezekiah said that the LORD had “cast all my sins behind thy back” (Isaiah 38:17). So it seems as if some individuals in ancient Israel were divinely given an insight into the truth of a *present* complete “forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14) that could only come through the cross.

But to trace the transition from Exodus 34:7 to the Lord’s wonderful words in Matthew 9:2, “Son, be of good cheer: thy sins are forgiven”, and thence to Colossians 1:14, will need another article, God willing.

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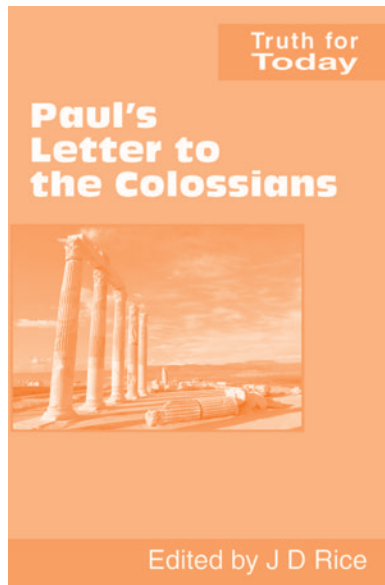
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# The face of Jesus Christ

‘At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun...’  
Acts 26.13

‘For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’  
2 Corinthians 4:6.

I have seen the *face* of Jesus—  
tell me not of aught beside;  
I have heard the *voice* of Jesus—  
all my soul is satisfied.  
In the radiance of the glory  
first I saw His blessèd face,  
and for ever shall that glory  
be my home, my dwelling-place.

Sinner! not to one who loved Him  
did the Lord this sight impart,  
but to one who crucified Him  
in the secrets of my heart.  
I—the one who Him had hated;  
He in judgment filled my place,  
God for me propitiated:  
it was He—I saw *His Face*.

*Emma Frances Bevan (1827-1909); second verse adapted*