

Scripture Truth



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Fundamentalism
Practical tracting
Creation Restored

Transcripts of Christ
Alpha People: Hannah
The Revelation of Jesus Christ
The Christian and the day of the Lord

Volume 58 No.3

July – September 2013

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH is published every three months to expound the teaching of the Scriptures so that we “may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

Annual Subscription 2013

£10.00 Post Free UK – £12.50 Post Free Overseas

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Front cover: Lilies at Cobble Hey Farm

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Registered Charity No. 223327

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Practical tracting

Street evangelism may not be the most efficient way of working the harvest field, but it does reach corners that many other methods cannot. It reaches people who would never accept any invitation to any event. Here are some tips from 13 years' experience. They apply to tracting that is not done in conjunction with street-preaching.

1. Find a place with a good footfall (Proverbs 1:20, 21). My understanding is that you have the right to offer religious or political literature in any public place so long as you are not causing a traffic obstruction or breach of the peace! However, many shopping precincts are private property. We often tract near an urban campus, and we have to be careful to stand on the public pavement and not on university property.
2. If possible find a place that's not too wide. Seeing someone ahead leafletting will make many people give you a wide berth without any idea that it's gospel literature. But, on the other hand, do position yourself where you can be seen well ahead. People who find themselves suddenly offered literature will almost never take it.
3. It's best, though not essential, to tract in pairs – certainly a woman should not tract alone.
4. *Smile* and make eye contact. This can be hard to keep up, and after an hour's tracting the mind may tend to wander. People are less likely to take tracts offered "mechanically."
5. Have confidence in the literature you are offering others (i.e., choose your tracts carefully). Be confident without being obstructive. We are messengers of the living God. In faith we can step forward politely and offer a "gospel leaflet", or "part of the Bible." Be sure to thank people sincerely for accepting. Some recipients may not have been shown any appreciation for a long time!
6. People don't bite. You might have to buy beggars a sandwich (never give money!), but I've never had a situation when tracting that seemed difficult to handle.
7. Don't try to pick winners. Offer your tract to the next person who comes along. Having said that, I only offer tracts to males. It's unbecoming for a man of my age to accost women.

8. Pray for conversations, but don't despair if they are rare. My co-tracter (note the "e"!) has ready repartee that starts conversations. I don't. Stick to the Scriptures in such conversations, getting to the gospel a.s.a.p.
9. In my experience one much-missed opportunity for productive tracting is downtown late on Friday and Saturday evenings (though along with others; and women only with men of the team nearby; and perhaps not into the small hours). It could be safer for older than younger men – they might seem less threatening to some tipsy belligerent! But choose a well-lit, *truly* busy place, and you should be safe. In several years of doing this in Manchester's nightclub district I never once felt threatened. The night-lifers have more time to speak than the day traffic, and it can be very rewarding. One well-known Christian outreach to bring practical help to the night-lifers dissuades its volunteers from direct evangelisation, so I am told. So the field is wide open. But the venture needs *prayerful* consideration.
10. Remember to pray, particularly for those you had conversations with.

Fundamentalism

Yannick Ford

Christian fundamentalism takes its name from a booklet series of one hundred years ago on "The Fundamentals," designed to underpin Christian faith against the then rising flood of unbelief. Flood levels are considerably higher now. Does your faith have the foundations to withstand them? The article originated as a Truth for Today talk on Premier Radio (www.truthfortoday.org.uk).

What do you think of when someone uses the word "fundamentalism"? It's generally used negatively, to portray rigidity, inflexibility, and bigotry. But the word itself is derived from the idea of foundations. I have deliberately chosen the title, "Fundamentalism," because it's a good way to make us think about foundations. I'm not really interested in labels that might be attached to Christians, whether in a positive or negative sense, but I am interested in the foundations of our faith! So the next time you hear the word "fundamentalist" being used, that's a good excuse to start thinking about, and getting other people to think about, foundations.

Good foundations are essential for a building. Problems with foundations can be very expensive to fix. The Lord Jesus's comparison of houses built on the rock and on the sand illustrates this very clearly. "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God

Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock... But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand..." (Matthew 7: 24-27, NKJV). The Lord taught that just as there are important foundations for physical structures, there are foundations for life too, and spiritual issues.

What are these foundations, these genuinely "fundamental" things? The Lord's answer to this question was, "These sayings of Mine." In the immediate context, "these sayings" are His teaching in "the Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7), but we can extend His reply to embrace all "His sayings." 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." "Inspiration of God" is [lit.] "God-breathed," and, as such, "all Scripture" is the inerrant word of "the God who cannot lie" (Titus 1:2; cp. John 10:35). The first half of Proverbs 30:5 says that "Every word of God is pure." Then Psalm 119:160 tells us that "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgements endures forever." In similar vein, the Lord Jesus tells us that although heaven and earth will pass away, His words will never pass away (Matthew 24:35).

But the Bible is a big book. How then can we determine what is fundamental?

Now it's important that we do not divide the Bible's teachings into "primary" and "secondary" truths, as if some parts were more important than others. The texts just considered show that all of Scripture is important. Nevertheless, just as a house has a superstructure that is built on a solid foundation, so there are foundation truths in the Bible. There are truths in the Bible that cannot really be properly understood if we do not have a firm grasp of the foundations.

Beginning at the beginning

Perhaps a good way of considering what might be foundational, or fundamental, is to look at the Bible's overall message as we go through it. Starting at Genesis 1:1, we read "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

We must start with a belief in God! Hebrews 11:6 spells this out clearly. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is..." The Bible is God's revelation of Himself. We need to understand that there is a God who made the world and who made us, and that therefore we are responsible to Him. The apostle Paul states this in Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

Moving on slightly, we see how God created the first humans, Adam and Eve; and how they fell by listening to the voice of the serpent, and so sinned against God. Now here is another fundamental truth, as confirmed in the conclusion that Paul draws in Romans 5:12. “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...” If we don’t see ourselves as sinners, we will never see our need of a Saviour.

The promise of a Saviour is itself another fundamental truth that is introduced very early in the Bible. After Adam and Eve had sinned, God pronounced penalties upon the serpent, on Eve, and on Adam. To the serpent God said that He would put enmity between its seed and the seed of the woman, and that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15). Revelation 12:9 identifies the “serpent” as Satan. And Matthew 1:20 with Luke 1:34-35 show the Lord Jesus Christ to be the seed of the woman, the Son of Mary. He is that promised Saviour, who bruised the serpent’s head. He defeated Satan by taking our judgement upon Himself, and so delivered us from the curse and judgement. And all the way through the Old Testament, we see many shadows, pictures and foretellings of the One who would take our place. For example the many sacrifices of the Old Testament; the brass serpent lifted up on the pole, that the Lord Jesus Himself spoke about to Nicodemus (John 3:14; cp. Numbers 21:9); and the predictions of the suffering Messiah in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.

Our God is a consuming fire.

Holiness and grace

Moving on further in Genesis, in chapter 6 we reach the Flood. This brings in another fundamental truth, namely, the holiness of God. Genesis 6: 5 states “that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” God is holy, and He cannot just ignore sin. He judged this state of affairs with a Flood. The Bible teaches us clearly that God is love – and the promise of a Saviour shows us that very clearly – but it also teaches us that God is holy. Hebrews 12:29 says plainly, “For our God is a consuming fire.”

But, on the other hand, not long after the history of Noah we read about the call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). This call exhibits another fundamental truth – the sovereign grace of God in choosing men and women for blessing, not because of any moral worth or excellence in themselves, but simply because of His love and for the glory of His grace. Joshua 24:2-3 tells us that Abraham was born to a family that served other gods. Then the God of glory appeared to him, and called him out of idolatry (Acts 7:2). The sovereign grace of God depends on God’s character,

God's ways, and God's glory, and in no way depends on our merit or fitness. If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we've been saved, if we know that our sins have been forgiven – it's thanks to God's grace, that is, to His altogether undeserved kindness. Once again we listen to the apostle Paul, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

*"For by grace you have been saved
through faith, ... not of works"*

What the law cannot do

As we go through the Old Testament, we see in the history of Abraham's descendants – the children of Israel – God's unfailing love and goodness towards them. But an important milestone in that history was the giving of the Law. "The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" – so Paul says in Romans 7:12. It shows us the holiness of God, and what His requirements are. But Paul also says, "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). The law is good, and shows us what we *should* do, but we have a sinful nature. The law shows us that we have sinned, and that we are sinners. Indeed, the very fact of having a law telling us to do this and not do that, makes us want to do the opposite. Therefore the law cannot make us good or righteous! This is a fundamental truth of the Scriptures.

But if the Law highlights our inability to reach and maintain God's holy standard, this is where the good news starts. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

What God did

What the law could not do, God did – He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus. This brings us back to the centrality of what the Scriptures say about Jesus our Saviour, our Deliverer. We might well say that everything about Him is foundational. As already mentioned, we see first the miraculous way in which He was born, with the virgin Mary as His earthly mother (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:34-35). This is important, because Jesus was made in the *likeness* of sinful flesh. He came as a real Man, a real human, so that He could be our Saviour; but He was not a sinner – He did not inherit the sinful nature from Adam. The words of the angel Gabriel to Mary

Everything about Him is foundational.

state that “that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

The Lord Jesus is holy, and He is the Son of God. What does “Son of God” mean? The Gospel of John tells us plainly both that Jesus *is* God, and that He was eternally *with* God before coming to this world as a human baby. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1: 1, 14). In this we get the nucleus of the truth of the Trinity – a foundation truth of foundation truths!

*The Word became flesh
and dwelt among us, ... full of grace and truth*

The Gospels plainly show the Lord Jesus to be Someone who truly fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law, who truly loved God with all His heart, and His neighbour as Himself (Matthew 22:35-40). And yet, although He went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), He was “crucified and slain by lawless hands.” But even this was according to “the carefully planned intention and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).

God had a purpose in permitting the cross. This purpose, together with the fact of Christ’s resurrection, are fundamental truths – we cannot do without them. The apostle Paul says as much. “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). He took our place and bore our judgment on the cross (1 Peter 3:18). The death and the resurrection of the Lord are truly foundational: “If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:17) But verse 20 follows: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”!

*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
He rose again according to the Scriptures*

Since Christ suffered for our sins, and was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25), it follows that He is the only way to God, the only way to have peace with God, knowing that our sins have been forgiven, and that our sinful nature has been dealt with. The Lord Jesus Himself says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No

one comes to the Father, except through Me” (John 14:6). And the apostle Peter says, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). This surely is a foundation truth!

*The Lord Jesus Himself says,
“I am the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father, except through Me.”*

All these foundational truths are highly important, and our eternal security rests on them. No doubt there are other foundational truths that this rapid survey has omitted. But hopefully this article has got the message across that in His Word, the Bible, God has revealed to us Himself, His saving plans, and, crucially, His Son. We need to have a good grasp of the overall message of the whole of Scripture, so that we are properly grounded in all of God’s foundational truths.

Judgment and the Lord’s coming

Two more must be mentioned. Firstly, that God will judge the world, committing all judgement to His Son (Acts 17:31). Hebrews 9:27 tells us that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” We need to be delivered from that judgement! And so the very next verse continues, “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” This verse brings us to the last of the fundamental truths to be mentioned here, namely, the fact of Christ’s return. Having started this article at Genesis 1:1, we will finish it with the words of the Lord Jesus Himself in Revelation 22: “And behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. ... I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. ... Surely I am coming quickly” (vv. 22:12,16,20).

So the next time you hear the word “fundamentalist,” think instead of foundations and fundamental truths! A well-founded Christian, one who is well grounded in fundamental truths, is prepared to take God at His word as revealed in the Bible. Having accepted God’s Son, Jesus Christ, as Saviour, he or she seeks to show forth the love of God in a needy world.

Surely I am coming quickly

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Chapter 2:1-17. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum

Donald Davison

What do the Lord's letters to these three churches teach us?

In the nineteenth verse of the first chapter the Lord Himself instructs John on the subject-matter of the entire book of Revelation. He instructs John to write to the seven assemblies in Asia concerning three things:

- Firstly, “the things which thou hast seen” (KJV); i.e., his vision of the Lord in the first chapter;
- Secondly, “the things which are” [now]; i.e., the letters to the seven assemblies that comprise chapters 2 & 3; and
- Thirdly, the things which shall be after these things (v19); i.e., the visions between chapters 4:1 and 22:6.

The first division was discussed in an article in the previous issue. The present article begins to consider the second division, the letters to the seven assemblies, in outline fashion, with the letters to the first three, Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum.

We will endeavour to look at these letters in four ways:

- How the Lord revealed Himself in a particular way appropriate to each assembly.
- How the things spoken of in these letters applied directly and specifically to each assembly addressed.
- How each letter contains things which apply to us in our day, and remedies for us to apply.
- How the seven together give a complete prophetic picture of the history of the assembly upon earth from Pentecost until the rapture of the saints.

Each letter follows a common structure. Each is addressed to the “the angel” of the church. Each starts with the Lord describing Himself in a certain way, often drawing on how He is presented in the vision of chapter 1:13-16. In each He commences by saying, “I know thy works”, and starts with what can be commended, before voicing, if need be, what must be condemned. Each contains the phrase, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;” and each includes promises to “the overcomer.” However the Holy Spirit makes a distinction between the first three assemblies addressed, and the last four. In the first three the phrase, “He that hath an ear...,” occurs before the promises are made to the “overcomer.” A response from the each assembly as such is looked for. The

last four place this phrase at the close of the letter. They look for a response in love and affection to the Lord from each individual.

One further distinction between the first three and the last four relates to their prophetic significance. The prophetic counterparts of the first three in Christian history run consecutively, one after the other, whilst in each of the last four the Lord's coming is spoken of (by inference in Laodicea, 3:16), implying that the prophetic counterparts of each of these four assemblies go on together until the Lord comes. The first three are called back to their original freshness. The last four look forward to the Lord's coming.

Now to consider the first three letters in turn.

Ephesus

All seven assemblies were situated in the western part of Asia Minor (i.e., of modern Turkey). Ephesus in particular had benefited much from Paul's ministry, including one stay of three years; and his epistle from prison to the Ephesians contains some of the highest truths of Christianity. Yet on his final meeting with the Ephesian elders at nearby Miletus (Acts 20:17-38) Paul warns them severely of coming dangers, and exhorts them to watch and remember the things which he had taught them.¹ Paul having passed away, it is given to John to write the letters in Revelation 2 & 3 to the area where Paul had so richly ministered. Perhaps the prophetic statement the Lord makes concerning John was being fulfilled: "If I will that he tarry till I come..." (John 21:22).

Were we to have visited this assembly, to our eyes all would have seemed to be in perfect order. To His eyes all is open concerning our spiritual condition.

It has been said that, were we to have visited this assembly in the first century, then to our eyes and outwardly all would have seemed to be in perfect order. The Lord is seen with the seven stars in His right hand and walking in the midst of the seven lamps (v.1). He is looking to see how brightly we are shining for Him. To Ephesus, as to all the other assemblies, the Lord says, "I know," reminding us that to His eyes *all* is open concerning our spiritual condition as saints of God – whether collectively or individually. In Ephesus there is much that the Lord can commend: their works, labour, patience, refusal of those who were evil, etc. (v.2). But the Lord "has against" this assembly that they had left their "first love" (v.4) – that is, their best

¹ On the importance of Ephesus in early Christian history and of the letters to it see two articles by David Anderson in *Scripture Truth*, October 2012 and April 2013.

love, their first love in time, place and order. They had lost something of the sweetness of His love and of the intimacy of communion with Him. This is a place and condition that is open to us to seek to respond to, and enter into individually, in affection to Him. The Ephesians are viewed as “fallen” [“dropped away,” v.5] and are called to repentance.

Paul’s great letter to the Ephesians (1:1) had been addressed to “the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus”. But this letter, like the other six, was addressed to the “angel” (2:1). “The angel” has been described as representing the element in each assembly morally responsible for the maintenance of the truth. This change of addressee puts some distance between the Lord and them. The Lord had detected decline and a cooling of affection towards Himself. The fine gold of the lampstand (cp. 1:12) is already beginning to grow dim.

At the close of the first letter the Lord commends the Ephesians for opposing the Nicolaitans (v.6). From the etymology of “Nicolaitans” these people can be interpreted as persons who would seek to rule saints for their own worldly advantage, “not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). Such are hated by the Lord (v.6). By contrast the overcomer is promised “the tree of life,” which had been lost when all access to it was barred in Eden. This tree is seen again in The Revelation “in the paradise of God,” on either side of the “pure river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:1). In that scene the never-failing river will sustain our souls. The tree will bear “twelve manner of fruits” suitable to sustaining our new bodies and giving some new refreshment and enjoyment of Christ every month.

Prophetically speaking, Ephesus as described in Revelation 2 would represent church history during the first century. Thus the prophetic history of the decline of the testimony of Christianity in responsibility on earth begins with Ephesus and ends with Laodicea. How sad that the decline began in Ephesus, which had been blessed with such visitations and teaching! This reminds us that whatever is committed to men ends in failure.

The call to repentance made to Ephesus, and repeated to Pergamum (2:5, 16), was not heeded by the church during the epochs of Christian history that these assemblies set forth; so that by the time we reach the fourth assembly, Thyatira, we read “I gave her space to repent and she repented not” (2:21). All hope of complete recovery to “first love” had gone. From that point onwards, as already said, the promises to the “overcomers” are addressed not to the whole assembly but to the individuals in each assembly.

It is a sad reflection that so early His people are seen by Him to have “left” and “fallen from” their “first love.” What a great voice this has for us to examine our own conditions as to how close a place in our affections the Lord has!

*The decline began in Ephesus.
Whatever is committed to men ends in failure.*

Smyrna

The letter to this assembly is the shortest of the seven. The name “Smyrna” means “myrrh,” a spice obtained from a bush yielding an aromatic resin with a rich perfume.² The spice is mentioned numerous times in Scripture, sometimes along with other spices. It is connected with the thought of rejection in Genesis 37:25; with the holy anointing oil in Exodus 30:2; and with the scene of joy and gladness surrounding our glorious Lord in Psalm 45:7 & 8, where it forms one of the aromas of His kingly garments. Myrrh was among the gifts offered to Him by the wise men in Matthew 2:11. The gold that they presented honoured His essential deity, and the frankincense the fragrance of His Manhood; but the myrrh spoke of His suffering and death. Since the word for “ointment” might be derived from “myrrh” the thought of the intense, many-sided sufferings of the Lord’s holy life and death, exuding richest perfume and fragrance unto His God and Father, may also be present in Mary’s anointing of His feet in John 12:3. Mark 15:23 tells us that when the soldiers offered the Lord wine mingled with myrrh as a stupefying drink He refused their attempt to alleviate His holy sufferings. However in John 19:39 it was myrrh and other spices that Nicodemus brought to the tomb. Even in the tomb there was no odour of death or corruption (Acts 2:31); on the contrary fragrance ascended to God as the precious body of His Son lay bound in grave clothes perfumed with myrrh. Thus “myrrh” may also be represented, albeit imperfectly, in the spirit of the church in Smyrna which would shortly know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings (Revelation 2:10), and which was one of only two among the seven for which the risen Lord has no word of censure.

For the letter warns this assembly of imminent persecution. What encouragement they would gain from hearing their Lord describe Himself at the outset as One who is “the first” [before all] and “the last” [after all]! (2:8; cp. Isaiah 41:4) He Himself “was [or, ‘became’] dead and is alive” in risen Manhood, the Conqueror of sin, death, hell and all the power of the enemy. The Lord knew all about their suffering (v.9) and was able to tell them to “fear nothing” of all that they faced. He assured them that their coming trial would be limited in duration to “ten days.”

Prophetically speaking, this assembly sets forth the Roman persecutions that lasted until the beginning of the fourth century. Some have suggested that these “ten

² Tom H. Ratcliffe, *Bible Plants, Fruits and Products* (Bristol, 2002), p.147.

*“He that overcomes
shall not be hurt of the second death.”*

days” represent the period of the last ten Caesars of the Roman Empire; others, the ten years of severe persecution under Diocletian, the last Caesar before Constantine. At the judgment seat of Christ all will be revealed, and then the Lord’s words to these suffering saints will come to pass, “Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life” (v.10). This crown will be given for distinguished service at the time when the promise and reward to this church will be, “He that overcomes [‘gains the victory’] shall not be hurt of the second death” (v.11).

“He knows what sore temptations mean for He has felt the same” (Isaac Watts).

At the present time thousands of saints are being persecuted in the same way in other parts of the world. There must be encouragement for them in reading this letter. We are able by the grace of God to give thanks for the liberty that we still have in the country in which we live. But we do not forget that the devil is successfully bringing the Lord’s name and word into further disrepute in our land, and causing the persecution of some of His people here.

Pergamos [Pergamum]

This was a compromised assembly, and the Lord describes Himself to it as the One “which hath the sharp sword with two edges” (v.12), taking us back to the description of Himself in 1:16.

Here too the Lord says, “I know thy works” (v.13). He knew all that was going on within the assembly (v.13). He saw those who were faithful and holding fast to His name. He knew that the church had had its martyrs. Antipas had been slain there rather than surrender his fidelity to the name and faith of our Lord Jesus. But the Lord also has severe things to say. Satan’s throne and Satan’s dwelling [or, permanent residence] was in their midst. The church was allied with the world. And in verses 14 & 15 the Lord says, “I have a few things against thee.” One might have thought that He had many things against them. But graciously He speaks of “a few things.” What a low state this assembly had got into, that they had dwelling in their midst a trinity of evil: Satan, the doctrines of Balaam who taught them fornication (compare Numbers 25:1ff; 31:16), and the doctrines of the Nicolaitans who were the rulers of the people! The Lord gives room for repentance (v.16). But if they do

Pergamum was a compromised assembly

not repent, a stern alternative awaits: “I will come... and fight against them with the sword of my mouth” – speaking of the word of God in its judgmental aspect.

As already said, the church history prophetically presented here shows that the professing church was not prepared to repent. Prophetically speaking, Pergamum represents that period when, instead of the church being in the world, the world got into the church. This period began in A.D. 313 when Constantine formally recognised Christianity as a religion of the Roman Empire; and shortly after he went on to preside over the first general council of the church (A.D. 325). This period lasted to about the end of the sixth century. At this time the world and the church became intertwined, and have been so ever since.

But the words to Pergamum have lessons for us too. Are there things in our lives that need to be repented of or given up? To those who are faithful, or “overcomers,” in the midst of such turmoil, the Lord holds out three wonderful promises (v.17).

Firstly, “I will give of the hidden manna.” The manna speaks of Christ in humble manhood in this world (compare John 6:32-35). Some of the original manna was laid up before God in the ark (Exodus 16:33,34; Hebrews 9:4). The things concerning Christ in “the days of his flesh” that were only seen and valued by God are now disclosed in measure to us today in our appreciation of Him, and will be more completely known to us when we reach glory. They are given to us individually, but where there are a number of individuals acting together in faithfulness, companies of the Lord’s people may be found in fellowship together feeding upon “Christ once humbled here.”

Secondly, “a white stone.” This is the sign of divine acquittal and approval. Thirdly, “a new name written on it.” The person giving a white stone often wrote a message on it known only to the person receiving it. What a favour, when, on account of difficult circumstances here below, one receives a personal honour known only to the Lord and oneself!

There on the hidden bread
of Christ – once humbled here,
God’s treasured store, forever fed.
His love my soul shall cheer.

Called by that secret name
of undisclosed delight
(blest answer to reproach and shame)
graved on the stone of white.³

³ J.N.Darby, *Spiritual Songs* (London, 4th edn., 1908), pp.16, 17.

Alpha People

Hannah

George Stevens

“And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation” (1 Samuel 2:1, KJV).

Her name

“Hannah” means “free gift.” The Hannah of the Old Testament lived out the meaning of her name when she gave back to God what He had given to her (1 Samuel 1:11, 28). This is called consecration – offering that to God with which He has filled our hands. All we have comes from Him, but how much do we use it in His service? A once-for-all consecration is found in Romans 12:1, where we are encouraged to offer our bodies to God as a living sacrifice.

Provocation

Hannah was the wife of Elkanah. She deeply lamented that she had no child. Nevertheless, Elkanah would show his love to her by according her a greater portion of the peace offering he was sacrificing than his other wife Peninnah and the children that she had by him. It seems that Peninnah was jealous of Hannah and spitefully provoked her whenever they went up to the house of the Lord for not being able to have children. The chiding was so severe that Hannah would not eat (1 Samuel 1:4-7). This would indicate the fasting that is associated with prayer. There is still a place for fasting in Christian prayer today (Matthew 6:16). It shows God that we are really in earnest about something.

But the Lord had shut up Hannah’s womb for a reason.

Bitterness of Soul

One year when they were in Shiloh Hannah went to the temple in bitterness of soul. She prayed to the Lord with weeping. Do we ever weep in prayer? This is particularly challenging when we are considering the sufferings of Christ at the breaking of bread. Are our hearts moved so much that we weep?

There Hannah made the Lord a promise. “O Lord of hosts,” she prayed, “if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head” (v.11). It is a serious thing to make a promise to God. Remember Jephthah. He vowed to sacrifice to God the first thing he saw when he returned to his house after successful service for God. The first thing he saw was his daughter. He had to keep his promise (Judges 11:30, 31, 34).

Misunderstood

Hannah said this prayer silently, in her heart. Eli, the high priest was nearby. He saw her mouth moving and thought she was drunk. He rebuked her. He was a man of little discernment who misunderstood the depth of Hannah's desire. Let's hope the leaders of our local church are more discerning and compassionate.

Hannah briefly explained that she had been pouring out her soul before the Lord. If the prayer of a righteous man achieved much, then that of a godly woman will also. Eli realised his error, and answered, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him" (1 Samuel 1:17).

Hannah seems to have been confident that the Lord would answer her prayer. Whether it was because of the encouragement from Eli in the end, or due to her faith alone, we are not told; but her sadness changed to gladness and she began to eat properly again (v.18).

Faith rewarded

The following morning, they rose early and worshipped together. Then they returned to Ramah, where Hannah soon conceived. She gave birth to a son and called him "Samuel," because he was "asked of the Lord" (v.20). The following year all the family returned to Shiloh except for Hannah who said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever" (vv.22, 23).

Husband and wife shared in the promise of Hannah to give the child to the Lord. In fact, Elkanah insisted that the promise be kept (v.23). God had remembered her, and she remembered God.

Blessing

When the child was weaned, Hannah went to Shiloh, taking an offering with her. This given, she explained to Eli what had happened. It caused him to worship the Lord (v.28). Hannah then prayed with joy. Her heart flowed out in a prophetic song that praised God for his salvation and wonderful acts whose result would be that the poor would inherit the throne of glory. Her prayer looked on to the strength that God would give to the king-to-be, David, the anointed of God. His power would be exalted (2:1-10). The true fulfilment of her prayer looks on to Christ. Thus the prayer of a once-afflicted woman outlines the blessing of God that will come through the Messiah.

Eli must have been overjoyed. He blessed Elkanah and his wife, and she became the mother of three sons and three daughters (2:20, 21).

"Of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chronicles 29:14). May we all have the spirit of Hannah..

Transcripts of Christ

J.N.Darby

Holiness of life and walk should be a concern to every Christian. This article does not treat of the necessary negative aspects of this matter, the constant attention to mortification of “our members on the earth” (Colossians 3:5). But it offers a compelling explanation of the positive side, of the transforming power of beholding Christ in glory.

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17). This is the liberty of grace, and we become “epistles of Christ” (v.3 – blotted ones, no doubt in ourselves, but we are not “written” concerning ourselves), transcripts of Christ, “written with the Spirit of the living God.” This is what we “are,” not merely what we ought to be. Though in ourselves we are most imperfect and failing, the definition given here by the Spirit of God of a Christian (see v.2) is that he is a transcript of Christ.

Now the natural thought of many a soul is this: “Well, if that be true, I do not know what to think of myself; I do not see this transcript in myself.” No; and you ought not to see it. Moses did not see his own face shine. Moses saw God’s face shine,¹ and others saw Moses’ face shine.

The glory of the Lord as seen in Moses’ face alarmed the people; they could not bear that glory. But we see it now with “open,” or “unveiled” face in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18), and yet are not in the least afraid; we find liberty, comfort, and joy in looking at it; we gaze on it, and, instead of fearing, rejoice. How comes this immense difference? It is “the ministration of the Spirit” (v.8) and “of righteousness” (v.9). It is Christ alive in the glory that I see; not Christ down here (sweet as that was), but Christ at the right hand of God.

The glory of the Lord as seen in Moses’ face alarmed the people; but we see it now with “open” face in Christ, and yet are not afraid.

Yet though that glory is in the heavens I can steadfastly behold it. Though He is in the midst of the glory and majesty of the throne of God itself this does not affright me, because this wonderful truth comes in, that the glory of God is in the face of a man who has put away my sins, and who is there in proof of it (Hebrews 1:3). I should have been afraid to hear His voice, and have said with the children

¹ Darby evidently considered that Exodus 34:34 was more governed by 33:11 than 33:20.

of Israel, “Let not God speak with me” (Exodus 20:19); or, like Adam with a guilty conscience, have sought to hide myself away (Genesis 3:8). But I do not say so now. No: let me hear His voice. I cannot see the glory of Christ now without knowing that I am saved.

How comes He there? He is a man who has been down here mixing with publicans and sinners – the friend of such, choosing such as His companions; He is a man who has borne the wrath of God on account of my sin; He is a man who has borne my sins in His own body on the tree (I speak the language of faith). He is there in glory as having been down here amidst the circumstances of sin and on the cross under the imputation of sin; and yet it is in His face I see the glory of God. I see Him there consequent upon the putting away of my sin, because He has accomplished my redemption. I could not see Christ in glory if there were one spot or stain of sin not put away.

The more I see of the glory, the more I see the perfectness of the work that Christ has wrought, and of the righteousness wherein I am accepted. Every ray of that glory is seen in the face of One who has confessed my sins as His own and died for them on the cross; of One who has glorified God on the earth, and finished the work that the Father had given Him to do. The glory that I see is the glory of redemption. Having glorified God about sin – “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4) – God has glorified Him with Himself there.

When I see Him in that glory, instead of seeing my sins, I see that they are gone. I have seen my sins laid on the Mediator; I have seen my sins confessed on the head of the scapegoat, and they have been born away (Leviticus 16: 22). So much has God been glorified about my sins (that is, in respect of what Christ has done on account of my sins) that this is the title of Christ to be there at the right hand of God. I am not afraid to look at Christ there. Where are my sins now? Where are they to be found in heaven or on earth? I see Christ in the glory. Once they were found on the head of that blessed One; but they are gone, never more to be found. Were it a dead Christ, so to speak, that I saw, I might fear that my sins would be found again; but with Christ alive in the glory the search is in vain. He who bore them all has been received up to the throne of God, and no sin can be there.

The more I see of the glory, the more I see the perfectness of the work that Christ has wrought, and of the righteousness wherein I am accepted.

It is the Holy Spirit taking of the things of Christ, and revealing them to my soul, that is the power of present practical conformity to Christ.

As a practical consequence of this, I am changed into His likeness. “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” It is the Holy Spirit taking of the things of Christ, and revealing them to my soul (John 16:14), that is the power of present practical conformity to Christ. I delight in Christ, I feast upon Christ, I love Christ. It is the very model and forming of my soul according to Christ by the Holy Ghost – this is the revelation of Christ. I not only get to love the glory, it is Christ Himself that I love; Christ that I admire; Christ that I care for; Christ whose flesh I eat, and whose blood I drink;² what wonder if I am like Christ? The Christian thus becomes the epistle of Christ; he speaks for Christ, owns Christ, acts for Christ. He does not want to be rich; he has riches in Christ, unsearchable riches. He does not want the pleasures of the world; he has pleasure at God’s right hand for evermore (Psalm 16:11).

Does the heart still say, “Oh, but I do not, and cannot, see this transcript in myself”? No; but you see Christ; and is not that better? It is not my looking at myself, but it is my looking at Christ that is God’s appointed means for my growing in the likeness of Christ. If I would copy the work of some great artist, is it by fixing my eyes on the imitation, and being taken up with regrets about my failing attempt, that I shall be likely to succeed? No; but by looking at my model, by fixing my eyes there, tracing the various points, and getting into the spirit of the thing.

Mark the comfort of this. The Holy Ghost having revealed to my soul Christ in the glory as the assurance of my acceptance, I can look without fear, and therefore steadfastly, fully at that glory, and rejoice at the measure of its brightness. Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, could look up steadfastly into heaven (doubtless in his case it was with more than ordinary power), and see the glory of God; and his face shone as the face of an angel (Acts 6:15; 7:55). And look at his death! Just like his Master, he prays for his very murderers. Stephen died, saying, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” Christ had died saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” In Him there was the expression of Christ’s love for His enemies. By the Holy Ghost he was changed, and that in a very blessed way, into the same image.

² See John 6:54-57. Darby in no sense meant this sacramentally.

*“I cannot see this transcript in myself.”
No; but you see Christ; and is not that better?*

The soul at perfect liberty with God looks peacefully and happily at the glory of God as seen in the face of Jesus Christ; and because it sees that glory, and knows its expression it walks before God in holy confidence. Instead of being happy and at liberty with Satan in Satan’s world, the Christian dreads Satan because he knows himself. At ease in the presence of God, he there drinks into the spirit of that which befits the presence of God, and becomes the “epistle of Christ” to the world, showing out to all that he has been there.

Well, what a difference! May we more and more make our boast in Him in whose face all this glory is displayed – the Lamb who has died for us, and cleansed away our sins by His most precious blood.

From The Christian’s Friend. Papers for the Comfort and Edification of the Children of God, ed. E. Dennett, London, 1877, pp. 125-8. Originally entitled, “The glory of the Lord (2 Cor. iii).” It has been slightly edited.

Creation Restored

David Anderson

*God’s perfect creation has been spoiled by sin. But did God fail? Impossible!
The intention of Eden will be realised in the millennium.*

Introduction

We can call the creation that was commanded and formed into being in Genesis 1:1 - 2:24 the “old” creation, because we know God has a new one coming! (Revelation 21:1) In time to come, He will make “all things new” (21:5).

When God made the “old” creation, it is recorded that at the end of each of days three to five “God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:12, etc., ESV). In the middle of the sixth day also, after making the land creatures other than man, “God saw that it was good” (v.25). And once He had made man, the apex of His creation, “God saw that [everything He had made] was very good” (v.31).

But, as we know, it didn’t last that way for very long. Genesis 3 recounts how, through the disobedience of that very apex of His creation – man – sin entered the world, “and death through sin” (Romans 5:12). The entrance of sin brought the entire creation, terrestrial and celestial, into corruption (Job 15:15; Romans 8:20-21). Up till now Satan, sin, and death have been permitted to defy God in the “old”

creation. But, in the new, righteousness will “dwell” unchallenged, and God will be “all in all” (2 Peter 3:13; 1 Corinthians 15: 25-28).

But is this “old” creation just going to be “written off” as a failure? Not so! God has no failures; He is going to win! All that the devil defiled and corrupted is going to be restored! In the millennial kingdom of God, and before God brings in His new creation, the devil will be restrained and all enemies except death defeated (Revelation 20:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26). Edenic conditions will first return (e.g., Isaiah 35:1-2,6-7) before this “old” creation is done away (e.g. Isaiah 51:6). So much so, that in some respects “new-creation” language can be used of this “old creation” in those wonderful coming days.

New creation in Isaiah – the original creation restored

This is why the prophecies of Isaiah climax by the Lord God declaring, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17). Most Bible translations provide marginal cross-references to 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1. These are texts that deal with the “real” new creation, to the creation that will succeed this one. But the context and internal evidences of Isaiah point rather to the millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. This can be verified by comparing and contrasting Isaiah 65-66 with Revelation 21:1-9:

- Isaiah’s centre is still the original earthly Jerusalem; and her people, Israel, are still claimed by Jehovah to be “my people” (65:18-19; 66:8-10, 13, 22-24). In contrast to this, Revelation 21:3 (describing new creation) applies the symbolic meaning of Jerusalem to the church, which is both new and heavenly (cp. Galatians 4:25-26).
- Isaiah 65:20 states that death, although perhaps exceptional, can occur. However, death is expressly said to be “no more” in the description of new creation in Revelation 21:4.
- In Isaiah (see 66:23) the times, seasons and Sabbaths established in Genesis 1:14-19 & 2:1-2 remain continuing features of life. These are among the “former things” that in Revelation 21:4 are said to have passed away (cp. Galatians 4:3,9-10).

Is this “old” creation going to be “written off” as a failure? God has no failures; He is going to win!

Nevertheless many of the moral and spiritual characteristics of the millennial Kingdom that will come “in power” at the public advent of our Lord from heaven will foreshadow those of the ultimate “new creation,” the “eternal state.” It will be characterized by righteousness. Throughout the millennium, righteousness will reign – “reign,” because enemies will still need to be held down (Jeremiah 23:5-6; 1 Corinthians 15:25). The Lord Jesus Christ will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. “Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice” (Isaiah 32:1). Isaiah 65:17-25, along with chapters 11-12, 35, 60-61, describe the effects of the Messiah reigning out of Zion (cp. Joel 3:17-18).

It will be a most blessed time. Other Scriptures, such as Psalm 72 & Zechariah 14, present the benefits of Messiah’s worldwide rule for the whole world. This entire creation, which is currently under bondage and groans for that time (the time of the revealing of the sons of God), will be liberated (Romans 8:19-22). It will come under the glorious dominion of the Son of Man – see Psalm 8, which prophetically celebrates His universal reign.¹ People will also be changed physically; great longevity of life will be the norm (Isaiah 65:20-24). Daniel repeatedly prophesied that the millennial Kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, that is, never to be superseded and enduring until the end of time (cp. Daniel 2:44; 4:34-35; 6:26; 7:13-14, 27 with 2 Peter 1:11).

Original and creatorial relations will be re-established as the Creator makes a covenant with the rest of creation on behalf of His covenant people (Hosea 2:16-23). Restored Israel will be in a proper new-covenant relationship with Him on the basis of “the blood of [His] covenant with [them]” (Zechariah 9:11). It will be a relationship as sure as the LORD’s powers to maintain His creation (Jeremiah 31:31-37). No wonder Paul describes this future period for Israel in new-creation terms as “life from the dead”! (Romans 11:15)

In summary, during the millennial Kingdom, the world will benefit from much that is *new*:

- A new spirit, the Holy Spirit – Isaiah 32:15-16; 44:3.
- A new morality resulting in ongoing fairness, righteousness and peace – Isaiah 2:3-4, 11:4-5 & 32:17-18; Micah 4:1-5.
- A new universal government, with Jerusalem its administrative centre – Psalm 72:8; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 3:17.
- A new economy centring on Jerusalem – Isaiah 60:17; Zechariah 14:14.
- A new climate – Isaiah 30:26; 60:19-20.
- A new topography – Ezekiel 47:8; Zechariah. 14:4, 10.
- A new distribution of flora and fauna – Psalm 72:16; Isaiah.32:15; 35:1-2, 6-7; 55:13; Ezekiel 34:25; 47:8-12; Joel 3:18.

¹ See ‘Psalm 8’ in “Creation in Psalms, Part 1”, *Scripture Truth* July 2012.

- A new zoology – Isaiah 11:6-9 & 65:25; Hosea 2:18.
- A new husbandry – Amos 9:13.

And it will be a world without:

- Idolatry – for God will be known and acknowledged throughout the whole world (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14; Zechariah 14:9).
- Want – for everyone will have plenty (Psalm 72:16; Isaiah 27:6; Jeremiah 31:12-14; Amos 9:13-15).
- War and violence – for there will be worldwide peace (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3; Zechariah 9:10).
- Injustice and oppression – for Christ will rule in absolute righteousness (Psalm 72: 12-14; Acts 17:31 – based on Psalms 9:8 & 98:9).
- Fear and threat – for there will be safety and total security (Micah 4:4 & Zechariah 2:4-5; 8:5).
- Confusion – for Babel will be undone (Zephaniah 3:9).
- Disease, disability, sickness (Isaiah 33:24; 35: 5-6).
- Dangers disasters, destruction, difficulties (Genesis 12:3 & 22:18; Jeremiah 4:2; Isaiah 35:8-10; 65:19).
- The devil’s influence – Revelation 20: 1-3.

All in all, these conditions are so different from the world that Isaiah experienced and that we experience, that “new” is an appropriate description of the restored creation. The Creator Himself effects all these changes when, at His Appearing, He cleanses all of the corruption and contamination of man’s sin, especially that from the tribulation period: “The *glory* of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Isaiah 40:5). No wonder that “the creation awaits with eager longing” for the coming kingdom! (Romans 8:19)

But it is a *kingdom*, an exercise of righteous authority, and it has a purpose, namely that *every* enemy be put down (1 Corinthians 15:24). The devil, who has been under total restraint during the millennial kingdom, will be released at the end of it “for a little while” (Revelation 20:3) to demonstrate that unregenerate man is basically no different from what he ever was since the Fall. But Satan’s rebellion will be summarily crushed; and he himself finally judged. Then will come the great white throne, and “death and hades,” too, will be “cast into the lake of fire” (20:7-15). The “last enemy” will have been destroyed. The whole purpose of this enormous history of creation will have been realised, namely that all the glory of destroying all evil will belong to God’s self-emptying, incarnate, self-sacrificing and risen Son alone (1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

Then it will be time to introduce the new creation.

The Christian and the day of the Lord

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

Theo Balderston

Do these verses imply that Christians will be on earth when the day of the Lord commences, and overturn the idea of an “any-moment rapture”?

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul answered his new converts’ question about whether their recently deceased Christian friends would miss out on coming with the Lord in His public glory to this world.¹ The following section of the Letter, 5:1-11, is probably also an answer to a question, this time for clearer information on “the times and the seasons.” Verse 2 shows that they meant “the times and the seasons” during which the day of the Lord would arrive. This second question and answer are the subject of this article.

The Thessalonians’ question

It seems that their question arose out of fear of coming into judgment. This would follow from the way Paul shaped his answer to culminate in an exhortation to put on “for a helmet, the hope of salvation,” and an assurance that “God appointed us not unto unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:9, RV). Without exception, all occurrences of the phrase “the day of the LORD” in the Old Testament depict it as a day of judgment. This is what Paul would have taught them (compare 5:3b with Isaiah 13:8) and how the Thessalonians, being ex-Synagogue-attenders, would have understood him. It may seem strange that they should on the one hand worry that their dead friends might miss coming with the Lord in glory to inaugurate that Day, yet on the other hand worry about themselves being judged in it. Perhaps they worried that their conduct had failed to measure up to Paul’s doctrine (see 4:3-7). New believers are prone to acute crises of assurance of salvation, especially believers as isolated as the Thessalonians.

And perhaps they sought clearer hallmarks of “the times and the seasons” in order to be able to monitor whether they had been consigned to judgment or not. If fear of judgment was their underlying problem, it is hard to think of any other reason for their request.

¹ This passage was the subject of three articles in the January, April, and October issues of *Scripture Truth*, 2012.

But one might wonder why they thought they needed such “hallmarks” at all. Surely, if they had been taught that the Lord might come for them at any moment (Luke 12:40), their overriding fear would be of the rapture happening and missing them out. Does not their interest in “the times and seasons” cast doubt on the doctrine of the “any-moment Coming”?²

Such an objection is unrealistic. It overlooks the uncertainty of life, the exceeding sparseness of Christianity west of the Levant, and the poor communications of the time. For all sorts of reasons the Thessalonians might never hear from, or of, Paul, Silas or Timothy again (consider 2 Corinthians 11:24-27). It is unlikely that they had been given contact details for the church in Antioch or Jerusalem. The non-disappearance of the few, equally unestablished Philippian and Berean saints might simply show that they, too, had not made the grade. Presumably the synagogue leaders in Thessalonica had contact with Jerusalem. But could they be counted on to inform the Christians they persecuted of any embarrassing turn of events in Judaea? Even a sound in the sky would be inconclusive without definite evidence of the disappearance of the saints. Thus the Thessalonians could never feel sure of knowing whether the Lord had come for His true saints, excluding them, or not. Their best guide, so they might think, would be by monitoring the “hallmarks” of “the times and the seasons.” Hence their question. Readers sceptical of such reasoning have perhaps never been acutely troubled by doubts over their own salvation.

Like a thief in the night

Paul’s answer to their question (5:2,3) is abrupt, yet revealing. “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them...”

Paul’s words imply that he had already taught them this. And yet he had also already taught them that that Day will not be present “except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 5).

How can these two statements be reconciled?

One reconciliation between the unexpectedness and the warning signs is advocated by some Bible scholars intent on amalgamating the rapture with the day of the Lord. They say that the signs will be obvious enough to make people sit

² Note that the “post-tribulational” view faces an analogous question. Why did Paul not simply meet their fears by writing, “Don’t worry. As soon as that Day starts you will definitely be snatched up to meet the descending Lord without experiencing any of its judgments”?

up, but never definite enough for anyone, believer or unbeliever, to be sure that they have not already happened, so that no-one can ever be sure that the Lord will not come at any moment! This view simply will not square with Matthew 24:15-16.

On the other hand some “dispensational” scholars maintain that the start of “the day of the LORD” will be coincident with the “rapture,” and that the outpourings of wrath in Revelation 6-16 are to be viewed as part of that Day, rather than precursors of it; similarly the “falling away” and the emergence of the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff. Thus the day of the Lord will come “as a thief,” because the rapture itself will come “as a thief.” But where would this scheme leave space for “the times and the seasons”? It seems that although aspects of the day of the Lord will indeed already be operative during “the times and the seasons” (compare Joel 2:1-9 with Revelation 9:1ff; and Joel 2:10,11,31) it is best to keep to the view that the day of the Lord is coincident with the Lord’s judgmental appearing.

*The day of the Lord is a day for unbelievers,
not for his believing readers.*

The true reconciliation between the unexpectedness of that Day and the warning signs seems to lie in careful attention to Paul’s words. He wrote in verse 3, “When *they* are saying...”, not, “When *ye* are saying...” He thereby implies that the day of the Lord is a day for unbelievers, not for his believing readers. This closely parallels the changes of person in the Lord’s “Olivet discourse” as reported in Matthew 24. When He speaks of His actual appearing in glory, His words are in the third person (“... and *they* shall see the Son of man coming...”, v.30). This contrasts with the consistent use of the second person in verses 4-25. Whoever the addressees of these verses may be, they are certainly believers. By changing to the third person in verse 30 the Lord implies that His appearing to the world will be a coming to unbelievers, not believers. After His appearing His angels will gather together the elect – necessarily a different company from those who will accompany the Lord at His coming (1 Thessalonians 3:13³) – but initially He will come to remove out of His king-

³ 1 Thessalonians 3:13 & 4:14 are critical to understanding Paul’s doctrine of the Lord’s coming in Thessalonians: on this see, “With all His saints,” *Scripture Truth*, January, 2012.

dom all things that do offend (Matthew 13:30, 41). And since what evidently worried the Thessalonians was this initial purpose of His appearing in glory, Paul, as a wise master builder, did not complicate his answer with matters irrelevant to their worries. He emphasises that the judgmental day of the Lord is something that will happen to unbelievers – and they are not of that number! That Day will of course overtake unbelievers as a thief because their hard hearts will have been oblivious of the fact that their woes are warning signs, even when they blaspheme God on account of them (Rev. 16:11,21).⁴

There is a touch of brusqueness about Paul's reply in verses 2 & 3. His meaning seems to be that if the Thessalonians were indeed in danger of being left on the earth for judgment (which he of course denied), then by the time "the times and the seasons" happened, their hearts, too, would be too hardened to notice any warning signs; so there was no point in his itemising them.

A digression on the words, "Peace and safety" might help to reconcile them with other scriptures. How will people be saying "Peace and safety" in times when their hearts are failing them for fear? (Luke 21:26)

Let us imagine a concrete scenario on the basis of Revelation 16:12-16, which says that the Lord will be coming as a thief even as the kings of the earth are assembling at Armageddon.⁵ This will be the period of the sixth vial, under which God will cause Satan to effect a concerted mobilisation of the entire world (unprecedented since Babel) at Armageddon. This will occur *before* the Lord's personal and glorious advent from heaven (19:11-21); the sequence in Zechariah 14:1-5 supports this point. It is unclear what unnerving terror Satan will use to make the entire world mobilise, but it could well be that the sheer success of this mobilisation will seem to the world to guarantee victory, making it breathe a sigh of relief and say *anticipatively*, "Peace and safety!" Even any believer of those days, if monitoring the signs and counting his 1260 days, might think he had miscalculated. In this way the day of the Lord would come unexpectedly, even though preceded by all the signs. This is mere conjecture, but illustrates how 1 Thessalonians 5:2,3 could be consistent with other prophetic scriptures.

⁴ The words "so cometh" in v.2, could on their own be taken to mean "entirely without warning events." But 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff rules this interpretation out.

⁵ Notice that if Rev. 16:15 described the only time the Lord's coming will be "as a thief," then the verse would have the opposite import for us. It would tell us that His coming will *not* be imminent until the world's forces are assembling at Armageddon. But Luke 12:35-40 and Mark 13:33-37 say that it could happen at any time. Hence both the Lord's coming for, and with, His saints must, in different ways, be "as a thief."

The Thessalonians' hope

The first thing to note about the continuation of Paul's answer in verse 4 is what he did not say. Paul did not write, "Don't worry. You will be in the middle of the terrors of that day, but have faith! You will come safely through them." Insofar as the Old Testament passages about the day of the Lord also speak of salvation in that Day, this is exactly how they represent it (Joel 3:14.16; Obadiah 15,17; Zephaniah 2:2,3; Zechariah 14:1-7; also in effect Isaiah 13:6-9; 34:8). But Paul did not write this. Instead he wrote, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief."

Paul did not mean "in the dark" in the sense of "not being clued up about the warning signs." Everywhere else he always uses the word "darkness" to denote the moral condition of the unbeliever. "Darkness" is something that believers once were, and from whose power they have now been delivered; whose works believers have to cast off and not participate in (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:8,11; Colossians 1:13). Whether the Thessalonians were clued up about the signs is irrelevant.⁶ What matters is that they had been delivered out of the authority of darkness. They were "all sons of light, and sons of the day; [they were] not of the night nor of darkness" (v.5).

Paul did not mean "in the dark" in the sense of "not being clued up about the warning signs."

Moreover, to understand the force of verse 4 we need to recollect that in the Old Testament the day of the LORD is often spoken of as a day of *darkness* (Joel 2:2; Amos 5:18, 20; Zephaniah 1:15; cp. Isaiah 13:9, 10; Ezekiel 30:3), and never as a bright day (cp. Zechariah 14:7). As former synagogue-attenders the Thessalonians would be well aware of this. The darkness of the unbelieving world will be matched by the darkness of the Day that will end it; this is what underlies Paul's statement in v.4. Hence, when he defines Christians as not of the darkness but of the light and of the day, the "day" he is talking about is not the dark day of the Lord! They belong to another day, a bright day. It may be coincident with the day of the Lord, but their "day" is not a day of judgment. Therefore, when Paul says that "ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day

⁶ It is in any case highly unlikely that; having deliberately steered the Thessalonians' minds away from the signs in verses 2 & 3, he will be obliquely hinting at them in verse 4.

*They will not come into the day of the Lord at all,
because they belong to a different day!*

should overtake you as a thief,” his meaning is not that they, unlike unbelievers, will be able to monitor the approach of the day of the Lord by recognising the warning signs. He means that they will not come into the day of the Lord at all, because they belong to a different day! They have been “delivered from the wrath to come;” God has “appointed them, not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9). It is true that they will come *with* the Lord when He inaugurates that dark Day (3:13; 4:14; Revelation 17:14); but they themselves will not be in it.

Paul calls them “sons of light and of the day” to affirm their certainty of glory. Their place in the Lord’s cavalcade as He comes in glory is already booked. It rests on divine election, not on themselves (5:9). Paul had sought to encourage them in this point of view from the start of his Letter: “Knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election” (1:3). Certainly they should “establish [their] hearts in holiness,” making it their business to live holily (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:3-8; 5:23). But they should not base their assurance on themselves, but on what God had appointed for them: He had already made them “sons of light.” Far from having anything to fear in connection with the Lord’s advent in glory, it will be their own kingdom-day, a day of rejoicing for them.

And so they should live their present lives “alertly” or “watchfully” (v. 6), that is, looking for the Lord’s coming (the word for “watch” that Paul uses here is often used elsewhere in this sense and never in the sense of monitoring the signs). But they should also live “soberly.” Some take this to mean, not in credulity or excitability (Vine). Or the meaning could be literal, and allude to the behaviour expected of those awaiting their own Lord (cp. Matthew 24:49). The need for holiness in the expectation of the Lord’s coming is a theme throughout the Letter.

Verses 9 & 10 affirm the twin foundations of their assurance of salvation. It rested on the one hand on God’s appointment – not to wrath but to salvation – and on the other hand on the motive that had led Christ to die for them, “that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him” (5:11). He desired them to be at His side for eternity. And He was coming for them to make that a bodily reality (4:17). Did the Thessalonians need to worry? Of course not!

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Heaven's joy

Will it be the glory bright
of those realms of endless light?
Streets all paved with crystal gold,
gates of pearl – of price untold,
harps, and thrones, and diadems,
palaces and costly gems?
No more sorrow, death, or pain,
meetings ne'er to part again?
Eyes undimmed by any tear,
peace unruffled by a fear?
All, and more than this, is given,
but 'tis not "the joy of heaven."

One there is, and One alone,
every ransomed saint will own
as the central fount of bliss:
heaven were empty without this.
Jesus, Lamb of God, Thou art
now the centre of my heart;
while by faith Thy face I see,
while I live, and feed on Thee!
E'en in this sad, weary waste,
often heavenly joys I taste:
Thou, the Joy of joys wilt be
of my heaven's eternity.

J.G. Deck (1807-84)