

SCRIPTURE TRUTH



October to December 2002

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Gordon Hughes

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 2002

£8.00 Post Free UK – £9.00 Post Free Overseas

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front cover photograph of Sardis (Sart, Turkey) supplied by John Weston

SCRIPTURE TRUTH is the imprint of the Central Bible Hammond Trust
Registered Charity No. 223327

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What Does the Bible Say About...?

2. Giving

John Keable

“I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24). David’s words to Araunah still challenge us today. This helpful article highlights some important features of Christian giving.

Mention ‘giving’ and one usually thinks of what goes into the collection box on a Sunday morning. Maybe we give ten per cent (why?), or maybe we give what we have left at the end of the week. For some, what goes into the collection box is the entire allotment for the Lord; for others, the collection is simply the tip of the iceberg. Why do we feel compelled to give? What instructions or advice does the Bible offer on the subject of giving?



1. A Giving God

The first thing to understand is that we serve a giving God! He has given us life, both naturally and spiritually. His greatest gift is the gift of His only begotten Son whom He gave to be our Saviour and Lord (John 3:16). Along with this greatest of all gifts, God has given us so



many others, far too numerous to list here. If you take time to think about all the good things we have from Him, your heart will surely

overflow with praise. James 1:17 sums it up: “Every good and perfect gift is from above.”

We must also understand that God’s love for us does not depend upon how much we give back to Him. He loves us because He is a loving God, not because

we deserve it. Whatever we give to Him is in response to His love for us. It cannot be some kind of bribe to win His affection! He has given us all He could give.

2. Affordable giving

This may come as a shock, but nowhere in the Bible does

God ask or command that we give more than we can afford. (There are examples of those who did so, but no instruction to that effect.) In Deuteronomy 16:17, God commands His people to give “in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you”. Later, writing to the Corinthians, Paul instructed them to give regularly and in relation to their income:

*We
serve a
giving
God*



“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income” (1 Corinthians 16:2). Examples of affordable giving can be found in Ezra 2:69 and Acts 11:29. Paul makes a further

point in 2 Corinthians 8:12 where he states that an acceptable gift is according to what a man has and not what he does not have. If you cannot afford to give it, then do not!

3. The ten per cent thing

Some Christians tithe (i.e. give ten per cent) of their income; others do not. “Why ten per cent?” Some believe that tithing began with the Jews and so is legalistic. Actually, the idea of giving ten per cent began long before God’s law to Moses. It began with Abraham. Genesis 14 tells the story of Abraham’s fight to save his nephew, Lot. After the battle, a king and priest, Melchizedek, as God’s representative, blessed Abraham. V.20 tells us that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils. Abraham was making an offering to God – an offering of ten per cent.

Later, Jacob received a promise of blessing from God. In response, Jacob promised to give back to God a tenth of what God gave to Him (Genesis 28:22).

When we get to Leviticus, we find that tithing was commanded of the Israelites. But skip on to Deuteronomy 12:6 and

we find that the tithes were the bare minimum which each Israelite had to give; other offerings were demanded as well. So if you do give ten per cent, it does not necessarily mean that you have done your bit for God!

It is worth noting that great blessing is promised to those who do tithe. You can find examples of these blessings in Deuteronomy 14:28-29 and Malachi 3:10. You will find many other examples of rewards associated with tithing.

One of the problems with tithing is that it can easily become a ritual and nothing more. The Pharisees had that problem. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus criticised the religious leaders because, although they gave ten per cent to God, they neglected justice, mercy and faithfulness. Take note, however, Jesus did not say that they were wrong to tithe; He did say that there are more important issues at stake than how much we put in the collection box!



There is an old saying, “Don’t ask, ‘Can I live without ten per cent of my income?’ Ask, ‘Could I live if God gave me ten times what I gave to Him?’”!

4. To whom to give

With so many demands upon our resources, it is often difficult to decide to whom we give and to whom we do not.

The first act of giving must be of ourselves to God (Romans 12:1). If we have not truly given our hearts and lives as ‘living sacrifices’ to Him, anything we do give is purely for our own ego-cen-

tered selves and will be of no real benefit. Paul writes of the Macedonians who “gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will” (2 Corinthians 8:5).

(a) Giving to the Lord’s work and His servants

The servants of the Lord will always need our support, as will the Lord’s work. It may be the maintenance or repair of a Gospel Hall; it may be the purchase of equipment; or it may be to enable a servant of the Lord to work full-time for Him. Paul certainly appreciated financial help from his Christian friends (Philippians 4:16).

In the Old Testament, money given by the Israelites was used to support the Levites, who were responsible for the upkeep of the Tabernacle and, later, the Temple (Numbers 18:21). God is very concerned that those who give their time to Him are rewarded.

Of course, we may be able to give in ways other than by giving money. In writing to the Romans, Paul instructed that we should “share with God’s people who are in need” and that we should “practise hospitality” (12:13). We may not be able to support a ministering servant financially, but if we can provide a good meal and/or a



bed for the night, God sees our giving and will bless us for it.

(b) Giving to those in need

We do not have to look far to find those who are in need. Every day we hear about a famine, an earthquake, or another war going on in some part of the world. In most of our towns and cities, there are people who are homeless, families on the bread line, people in debt, people in trouble...the list goes on!

A verse of Scripture I find challenging is Matthew 5:42: “Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants

to borrow from you”. The trouble is that almost every day a letter comes through the door drawing attention to yet another worthy cause or desperate need. Invariably, the letter is written in such a way as to make you feel that if you do not give your life’s savings to this charity, you will have somebody’s death on your conscience for all eternity! With the best will in the world, we must realise that we cannot possibly give to every need that exists. I do not believe that we are meant to do so.

We are given some very good advice about giving in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. Paul instructs that a certain amount of money be put aside each week for use in



the Lord's work. The idea was that the Corinthians should save up a special fund so that, when a need did arise, money would be available to meet it. In this case, Paul would write to them so that they would know the need was genuine.

That is a great idea, but we do not have Paul around to tell us what is a real need and what is not! True, but we do have the Holy Spirit living within us. If we are truly relying upon Him, He will guide us as to where our gifts should go.

On a practical note, I think we should stop being afraid of saying 'no'. If all our available money is going to meet one particular need, there is nothing left to meet another. Does this mean that we do not care? Of course not! We must be good stewards of what God has given us, and that means being careful where we send our money.

5. Final thoughts and conclusion

Anything we give should be in secret. We are not to give to draw attention to ourselves (Matthew 6:2).

God promises a blessing to those who give (Luke 6:38).

The ability to give is a gift! (see Romans 12:8).

God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

God loves a cheerful giver

God is not really so concerned about how much you actually put into the collection box on a Sunday morning. He is more concerned about the condition of your heart. Two stories illustrate this. The story of the rich, young ruler tells of a man who had turned money into a god. When faced with the challenge of giving it all away, he went away a sad man (Matthew 19:21,22). As far as we know, it cost him his soul. In contrast, the story of the poor widow tells how she put just two small coins into the collection. Jesus was impressed because she had given all that she had (Luke 21:1-4). In her life, her relationship with God was far more important than knowing where the next meal was coming from.

Knowing that God has given so much for us, how can we not at least think again about how much we are prepared to give to Him?



Lessons from Ezra

Part 2

Ted Murray

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we...might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Take to heart the valuable lessons from what was written more than 2,300 years ago.

The place of worship (ch.3)

In this chapter, obedience is a key feature of the returning remnant of Israel. The people wanted to be in God's centre, Jerusalem. They were marked by devotion to God. They had no homes to move into. There was no beautiful building in which to worship God. Everything was in ruins.

We have no indication of the time which elapsed between the end of ch.2 and the beginning of ch.3. We must assume that they had built some form of shelter for their families. They then made preparation for the rebuilding of the temple by clearing away the rubbish which had been strewn around the temple area. This would remind us of the importance of both the home and the place of worship. The home is the place of influence on the family and should be the place where children first hear about the Lord. We are reminded of the influence which Timothy's mother and grandmother had on him (2 Timothy 1:5).

Giving God His place

The site of the temple having been cleared, but the foundations not yet laid, the people built the altar of God (v.2). We do not find any of man's innovations here, but that the people searched the Scriptures and were guided by "as it is written in the law of Moses". The leaders

and the people accepted the authority of Scripture and were obedient to it. Here is yet another lesson for today. So many, today, are apt to look for modern man's thoughts on a given matter or, in some cases, to put more weight on tradition rather than on what Scripture teaches. The people gave priority to the worship of God and God honoured this desire.

The chapter starts with the words "And when the seventh month was come". This was the month when the Jews were to celebrate three feasts of Jehovah – the feast of Trumpets, the Day of atonement, and the feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23). These feasts remind us of repentance, redemption and rejoicing. We are not told in this chapter of the celebration of the first two, but we do read "they kept also the feast of tabernacles" (v.4).

Gathering in unity

It is good to see that the people "gathered themselves together as one man in Jerusalem" (v.1). Psalm 133 reminds us of the blessing of unity. It is not possible, today, to re-gather the whole Church of God in one visible unity. But it is still possible for even a few believers to meet on the ground of the Church of God, without sectarian tags and traditions, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

We should remember that the unity of the Spirit cannot simply be legally enforced and is broken by discord. During the last few years, so many of God's people have experienced a lot of discord amongst themselves. This has been mainly due to some wanting to rule and thereby enforce a man-made unity. The sad consequences of such actions are all too evident. Thankfully, we do have a remedy. We find that unity is maintained by those who seek "peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

In v.5, we read that they offered the continual burnt offering. That offering prefigured Christ offering Himself without sin to God and, as such, brought pleasure to God (Leviticus 1). It was offered up morning and evening daily. There were no dissenting thoughts or voices to this offering. The people were at one in worship. They appreciated the fact that, in this scene of breakdown and discouragement, there was a continual offering being made to God.

We also read that everyone was willing to make freewill offerings unto the LORD (v.5). There was nothing lacking. The lesson for us today surely is that if the effort is made and we willingly give more of our time, leisure and wealth to the Lord, He will add His blessing and prosper the testimony of His people. The people of Zerubbabel's day took heed to God's word. They did not deviate from the instructions given by God to Moses but followed them to the letter.

The problem today is that so often we want to have our ideas incorporated into the way we worship. The simplicity of New Testament teaching has been

embroidered with our ideas of order, procedure, on how and when we should remember the Lord. Thankfully, amidst the breakdown of the day in which we find ourselves, it is still possible to meet in simplicity, having fellowship with all who call upon the Lord with a pure heart.

*An eagerness
and an
enthusiasm
to
re-establish
what had
been lost*

Other feasts were also celebrated. The New Moons and all the set feasts were re-established according to all that had been written. There was no holding back. There was an eagerness and an enthusiasm to re-establish what had been lost. Would to God that we in our day had something of their spirit! We seem to be beset with life's problems, with family commitments and with other things which tend to detract and deflect us from giving our all to the Lord. Paul reminded the Colossians that Christ must have the pre-eminence (1:18). On our part, we are

happy to quote this verse but are more often than not reluctant to obey it.

Rebuilding the temple

This section, verses 4-7, ends on the happy note that provisions were also made for the various items required for the establishment of the temple. This would remind us of our obligation to meet the needs for the furtherance of the Gospel.

The place of witness and worship was in ruins but they came to the "house of God" (v.8). The enemies of God had joined together in an attempt to bring to naught that which was for God in this world. We can rejoice that, even in a situation like this, God's purposes are never thwarted. His witness to the world is ever sure, even in a day of breakdown.

We should remind ourselves that "the house of God, which is the church of the living God," is also "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Today, we can encourage ourselves in the fact that although much of the truth as to the Church was lost during what we call the dark ages, it has been recovered thanks to faithful men. These men and women turned from human traditions to the living Christ, despite persecution and martyrdom. This treasure has been handed down to us in our day though, sad to say, there are many who have little or no appreciation of its value. The breaking of bread is looked upon as just another way of celebrating the Eucharist. That remembrance feast, when one's heart and mind are engaged with the beauties and glories of our living Lord, leading us on to worship of the Father, is surely a taste of heaven on earth.

We noticed that other set feasts were revived. These feasts surely speak to us of fellowship – those times of joy, sharing with one another the blessings which God has bestowed upon His own. We live in a day when meetings for fellowship and the ministry of God's word are neglected by many. The pressures of modern life are making terrible inroads into the life and wellbeing of the assemblies of God's people. By contrast, it is noticeable that the temples of merchandise are well attended, by saint and sinner alike, in this day of affluence!

Together in worship

The key word of this chapter is 'together', a word which surely speaks of fellowship. It is used three times: "gathered themselves together" (v.1); they "stood...together, to set forward the workmen" (v.9); "they sang together" (v.11). What a message for us today! If, because of spiritual pride, we cannot gather together, there is no way that the work in the assemblies can progress. As a result of that inactivity, there will be no real singing.

This remnant realised the necessity of fellowship with one another in the Lord's work and the result was manifested for all to see and hear. The recovery was a source of great joy and praise. At the end of this chapter, we read of shouts of joy and cries of sorrow being heard afar off (vv.11-13). The two could not be distinguished. In praise and testimony, there is room for the vitality of the young and also the memories of the old. Both voices should be audible. They are not discordant but blend into one magnificent note which those around have to take account of.

*God was
given
His rightful
place in
their midst*

What noise are we making amongst the break-up of today? Is it joy mingled with a sense of sorrow or is it that of discord and argument? The people of God in this chapter were bound together in one common task. They desired to praise and worship God and to let it be known to all around that God was given His rightful place in their midst.

Difficult days (ch.4)

Believers today can readily identify with the situations encountered by the people of God in this chapter. Here we have two attacks on the Jewish remnant, both motivated by Satan. In the first attack, with the offer of help in the rebuilding of the temple (v.2), we see how insidious are Satan's wiles. In the second, we have a direct attack on the remnant as a result of their having rejected the offer of help

from those whom Scripture describes as "adversaries" (v.1).

Satan's deceit

These adversaries were the descendants of a people brought into the land by the Assyrians after they had carried away the ten tribes. At the command of the Assyrian king, these people in Samaria were taught to worship God by one of Jeroboam's priests. Sadly, they then compromised the teaching of these captive priests by fearing the LORD yet serving their own gods (2 Kings 17). The Samaritans of that day can be likened to some in Christendom today who have a form of Christian worship but deny the fundamental truths of the Gospel. They do not accept the word of God in its entirety; they deny the virgin birth and the deity of Christ; they walk in a wordly fashion.

The example in our chapter shows how we should deal with this type of help. Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the leaders of the remnant refused the alliance which had been proposed, thus maintaining the principle of separation. In this way, they declared that they were wholly for God, in spite of the attractiveness of the help of these Samaritans who, as stated in v.1, were in reality adversaries. Today, we should be aware of this insidious way in which Satan attacks the church.

At the end of ch.3, the people were full of joy. The Lord had blessed their efforts to lay the foundations of the temple. Satan chooses just such a moment to launch his attack. We need to be careful of so-called offers of help and not be afraid to refuse such. Zerubbabel's answer was very clear: "You may do nothing with us to

build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us" (v.3). Through this action of the leaders, the remnant was maintained in a path of separation, the neglect of which in the past had been the cause of all their trouble. Had they agreed to this offer, the work would have been ruined from the start. The end of the book of Nehemiah plainly shows the failure which spoiled the results of that which started so well.

We only have to look into church history to see similar examples of failure through compromise. The Reformation started out well but fell very short of what might have been had some of the leaders not made alliances with secular persons and powers. The results of these alliances are a sad record of wars and intrigues which beset the church. Revelation 17 shows us the terrible result of religion compromising with secular powers and politics. Believers today need to realise that we cannot compromise with a Christless profession or a godless society. In today's climate of pluralism, we need to take care to be independent of the world's systems and thus be separated unto the Lord (2 Corinthians 6:17,18).

Satan's onslaught

For the remnant, the watchword was separation, not compromise. This resulted, as we see later in this chapter, in a more intense form of opposition. The situation is the same today as it was in Zerubbabel's day. If true believers maintain a path of separation from the world, opposition will follow. If the path taken is compromise, then opposition may be avoided, but the power to live a life for

Christ will be greatly diminished. We should realise that a life lived for the service of the Lord will result in some persecution: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). Persecution does not always take on a physical character but has many forms and affects the believer in numerous ways. Satan has had a lot of experience in this field and knows all our weaknesses.

The opposition grew (vv.4,5) and was persistent. In vv.5-7, we learn that the opposition lasted from the days of Cyrus to those of Darius. In between these kings came Ahasuerus (not the one mentioned in the book of Esther), but known as Cambyses in secular history. It seems as though the opposition had little success during the time of these kings. The remnant stood firm, carrying on the task which they had started with a firm conviction that they were carrying out the will of God and the command of the king. Artaxerxes now comes into the picture. He is identified as the usurper and also known as Smerdis. Having seized the throne, he would be very much disposed to annul the decrees of his predecessors, so establishing his authority. The opposition see their chance and write a letter. From 4:6 to 6:18, the language used is Chaldean or Aramaic. These are the actual transcripts of the letters which passed to and fro.

The letter to Artaxerxes is a misrepresentation of the truth as to what was happening. Today, it would be called spin. It was what they thought the king would like to hear and, from what we read from v.17 onwards, it had its desired effect. In the letter, they profess a great concern for the

king's interests and express their fear that his taxes would not be paid and he would lose his dominion beyond the river. They then stretch the truth, stating that the Jews are rebuilding the walls and the city. Some of the houses in Jerusalem may have been rebuilt (Haggai 1:4), but permission for the rebuilding of the walls was not given until the days of Nehemiah. This remnant, under Zerubbabel and Joshua, were not bent on building reputations for themselves, but were establishing a place of testimony and worship in the place the LORD God of Israel had commanded through Cyrus. We are reminded of the Lord's words: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33). So Paul reminds us that Christ must have the pre-eminence in all things (Colossians 1:18).

We then read of the cunning way in which their enemies displayed the dirty washing of Israel's past. We cannot hide our dirty washing. It behoves us, as Christians, to walk circumspectly in this present evil world (Galatians 1:4). Christians today are often besmirched by the acts of those who profess Christianity but do not practise it. The unfaithfulness of Zedekiah and others of the kings prior to the captivity was used to good effect by the accusers. V.17 onwards records the king's answer. The work was stopped by force of arms even though the edict of Cyrus had not been revoked. The work ceased until the second year of Darius, king of Persia (v.24). To the casual observer, it might appear that the work of God was defeated. We should take heart in the fact that God's purposes cannot be put to one side. The One who is the Alpha and the Omega has the last say.

Sadly, what happened from the time the work ceased until it was re-established is something we are all accustomed to. It is called apathy. We see it creeping in in the first of the letters to the seven churches, and finally rampant in the seventh letter (Revelation chs.2,3). It appears that, in this intervening period, the Jews looked to their own comforts. They built their panelled houses, stored up their goods, and carefully looked after their own interests. There is no suggestion that their adversaries caused any suffering to the Jews during the time they were looking after their own comforts.

So it is today. We can work all the hours that are available. We are encouraged to make our own way in our chosen careers. If we are sports minded, this is also encouraged. The world will have nothing to say against all these things. But in making these our aims in life, we are not fully engaged in the work of the Lord. The thing that offends the world is to see the claims of Christ being met – to see Christians energised by the Spirit, their light no longer hidden under a bushel, but shining brightly. This exposes the selfishness, pride, hypocrisy, and the other evils that are present in the world.

Thankfully, the work was re-started, as chs.5,6 record. Let us be encouraged that our God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20,21).

Predestination and Election

Mark Davison

Predestination and election are subjects which are clearly taught in Scripture. Yet many Christians struggle to understand them. A proper appreciation of these subjects serves only to demonstrate how deeply important each one of us is to God. Take time carefully to read this helpful introduction. Please read Romans 8:28-9:24 before you begin.

Introduction

"Try to explain election, and you may lose your mind; but explain it away and you will lose your soul!" This statement sums up very well the importance of this doctrine, which runs from the beginning to the end of Scripture.

As we look at these two doctrines of predestination and election, we will find that there are some difficult questions which arise. For some, we can find answers in the Bible, but there comes a point at which we simply cannot comprehend the work of God. Whilst we can look at the Word of God and see what it

says, in the end we can only have faith in God as to the way in which He works. We must echo the words of Abraham to God: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).

In the light of this, it is fitting that the section quoted at the top of this article begins with a verse which reassures us as to the way in which God works: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Even if we cannot understand God's ways, we can be assured that He knows what He is doing, and will work things out for us as He knows best.

The two doctrines of predestination and election are closely related, but not synonymous. If we imagine them as concentric circles, predestination is the larger, outer ring, whilst election is the smaller one contained within it. We will return to election later.

Predestination

A good definition of predestination is 'Marking out the path beforehand'. In the context of Scripture, we see that God has mapped out the course of the entire universe (Proverbs 8:27-29). All that occurs in the universe does so in accordance with the decree of God. Nothing

*Called
according
to
His purpose*

takes Him by surprise, as He foreknew all things. This is particularly emphasised with reference to the death of Christ (Acts 2:23; 4:28). God has the right to predestine, or to mark out beforehand, because He is the Creator of all things. Having firstly made all things, and set them in their proper place, it is His right to do with them as He pleases. (This introduces the matter of the sovereignty of God, which we will define later. It is impossible, however, to look at the teaching concerning predestination and election without taking account of the sovereignty of God.)

God is also able to predestine the course of the universe because He is all-powerful. No-one else would have the power to devise the plan and carry it through.

This raises the first difficult question. Has God predestined the evil acts of mankind? With the understanding we have of God (at least, as much as we mortals can understand God), we know

*Plans
to give you
a hope
and
a future*

that this could not possibly be the case (Psalm 145:17). However, God knew beforehand how men and women would behave in certain circumstances. Having given man a free will to behave in the way he chooses, God permits these things to occur, though they would not be His desire. On the positive side, we can read the beautiful words of God in relation to Israel, and claim them equally for ourselves today. In Jeremiah 29:11 we read, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.”

We may not be able to see the ‘prospering’ which God has in mind for us, but we can be sure, in the light of Romans 8:28, that this is certainly the case. When we come into His presence in glory, all will be clear to us. This leads us into the aspect of predestination in relation to believers.

Predestination and election are often linked with a ‘calling’ from God (Romans 8:30; 9:24). This is an important point, for it re-emphasises the fact that God gives man a free choice in the decisions which he makes. Sadly, not all men respond positively to His call (Matthew 22:14).

Election

We turn now to election, a definition of which is as follows, “the sovereign act of God in grace whereby certain persons are chosen from among mankind for Himself, for a purpose or destiny of His own appointing”. The thought of election is more exclusive than predestination. The first thing to notice is that it is

based entirely on God’s good pleasure and love: “He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, *in accordance with his pleasure and will*” (Ephesians 1:5; n.b. though this text speaks of predestination, it is referring (see v.4) to the election of people by God for Himself). “...the mystery of his will *according to his good pleasure*, which he purposed in Christ” (Ephesians 1:9). We cannot explain the choice which God makes in the election of His people other than this.

The thought of election is present throughout Scripture. There were many people living in Ur, but God called Abraham to carry out His purposes. Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, but God chose Isaac to be the one through whom He would fulfil His plans. In the next generation, Jacob was appointed for blessing, not Esau. Even the nation of Israel was chosen by God simply because God loved them (Deuteronomy 7:8). In the New Testament, Jesus showed that God’s sovereign choice was now extended to the Gentile nations also (Matthew 21:43).

We are justified, however, in asking the question, ‘*Why* has God chosen me?’ We read a remarkably simple fact in 2 Thessalonians 2:13: “From the beginning God chose you to be saved”. As so often in Scripture, that simple statement is also very profound. To think that God marked you and me out *in eternity past* to be saved *in time* and glorified *in a future eternity!* Surely we should be filled with awe! However, we can go further than this. Romans 8:29 tells us that we have been elected “to be conformed

to the likeness of his Son”. That same verse goes on to say that this is to bring honour and glory to Jesus, by showing Him to be the “firstborn among many brethren”.

We need to understand that God’s sovereign choice often contradicts human wisdom, or perhaps, human expectation. Human society of the time would have expected the elder son to be the superior, with the younger subservient to him. Yet Roman 9:12 reminds us again that the opposite was the case. We might have expected that God would reveal His thoughts to the most intellectual and intelligent of mankind, yet 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 shows that this was not the case. God’s perspective is very different from ours, and He knows better than we do.

Romans 9:14 then poses a question: “Is God unjust?” Clearly we know that this could not be so. But how do we square the circle of whom God chooses and whom not? Unfortunately, we usually approach this question from the wrong angle. We seem to think that God is unjust because He does not save all. The converse is, in fact, the case. God is under no obligation to save *any*. “Whoever does not believe stands condemned already” (John 3:18). We need to understand that we are all under condemnation because of sin in our lives. God, therefore, owes mercy to none. So we might say that He has every right to condemn all to a lost eternity. Furthermore, none of us would have chosen God if the decision was left to us. It is surely, therefore, a merciful God who chooses to save even one of His rebellious creatures.

To leave the matter like that, however, is to deny the very person of God himself. It portrays God as a vengeful deity like the gods of legend and mythology. God must remain faithful to Himself at all times. So, if He were to save all mankind (a kind of blanket amnesty), He would contradict His own holiness and justice since these require that sin should be punished. On the other hand, if He allowed all to be lost, this would be a denial of His love, grace and mercy. The doctrine of election answers the dilemma.

The sovereignty of God

We have mentioned the sovereignty of God a number of times. Election is a sovereign choice of God. In earlier ages, it would have been easier for people to understand the meaning of sovereignty, because the king or queen (the sovereign) had absolute right to do as they pleased. No-one could question their actions. Similarly, God has absolute right to do with us as He pleases. After all, He created us and has sustained us through life. However, God does not do things 'for the sake of it', otherwise we would have the image of a God who toys with mankind, like a cat plays with and torments a mouse. The actions which God takes are to serve His purposes. God has always desired to have a people of His own to glorify and worship Him, and upon whom He could shower down His blessings (Romans 9:23,24). He still works to that end.

Romans 9:16 also confirms that the mercy of God does not depend on our righteousness, but simply on the sovereign choice of God. Both Moses and

Pharaoh were murderers, but God chose Moses to save His people and hardened Pharaoh's heart (Romans 9:17).

Some may conclude, after a study of this subject, that there is no point in any further evangelical activity, for the results are a foregone conclusion. God forbid! We have stated already that God has given man a free will to choose the course that he will take. After all, Pharaoh was given many opportunities to acknowledge the power of God, but chose instead to resist the evidence which was before him. This means that we still have a responsibility to preach the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ, but we must leave the results to the mercy of God. God also knows how we will react in these things – whether we will be dependent upon Him in prayer.

Finally, it should be pointed out that in the New Testament the true Church of God is often called the 'elect' (Romans 11:7; 2 Timothy 2:10). That Church includes every person who has truly confessed Jesus as Saviour and Lord. If you are included in that number, you, too, can take great joy in the fact that God has chosen you *in eternity past* to be saved *in time* and glorified *in a future eternity*. You have a glorious hope of an eternity of bliss in His very presence to which to look forward.

Praise be to God for His mercy toward us!

Jesus' Farewell Words

Part 5. John 16:1-33

David Anderson

John 16 contains the last words of Jesus to His disciples before the cross. As such, they have a special and an enduring appeal to all believers. The Lord's warning of difficulties ahead and His promise of provision for the future are both relevant for today. This article is the fifth in a series originally broadcast on London Premier Radio's 'Truth for Today' programme.

Introduction

Friends do not like leaving each other. If, as sometimes happens, it is to be a permanent separation, the experience is especially painful. In John 16, we find that was particularly so for the close friends of Jesus. The chapter is part of His very last words in His farewell talk to His disciples. His divine love expresses itself in the opening verse, "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble" (v.1).

Chapters 13-15 have gone over "these things". Two major points have been made by the Lord. First, that He was going to leave them and they would have to live without His being physically present with them to manage their affairs. Second, that a new 'day', which we now know to be the Christian era, would start after He left. With the first, He prepared them for the difficulties of Christian life in a hostile world; in the second, He gave them to understand the advantages to them of living in the Christian age. We need these same lessons today.

Ch.13 introduced the necessity for Christians to love and serve each other, as is shown by Jesus' example of feet washing. In ch.14, there were the heart comforting assurances of the Christian's communion with God: the Father, the Son and

the Spirit. The Spirit indwells and abides with each believer. Ch.15 presented the way in which Christians can show the character of Christ, the True Vine, by abiding in Him and so producing fruit for God.

Now, in ch.16, Jesus speaks openly of His going away. He is very conscious of its immediate effect upon His followers, as He says in v.6: "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart". They were sad because they realised that they would soon be separated from the One who had been their Helper. However, Jesus wanted to comfort them and to assure them that it was for their ultimate good. So He says, "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (v.22).

In this chapter, Jesus tells them about:

- ✿ the suffering and the sorrows they had to face (vv.1-6);
- ✿ the work of the Spirit (vv.7-15);
- ✿ the meaning of His going away (vv.16-21);
- ✿ the Christian's privileges in that day (vv.22-33).

Suffering and sorrow in store

First of all, it was necessary to tell them about, and to forewarn them of, the persecution which they would receive from the world, especially from religious Jews. The world had hated their Master and so they, too, would receive the same treatment. The time was coming when this would lead to excommunication and even murder, as we find in the accounts of the early Church in Acts. There we find that those who treated believers in this way thought that they were doing God's service, as v.2 of our chapter states. Jesus goes on to point out that the reality was: "These things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me" (v.3).

However, Jesus was not abandoning His followers to face this situation in their own strength. The Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, was provided to be the power for witness in these circumstances (15:26). Jesus had already stressed the fact that the Spirit is "another Helper", exactly the same as He himself had been. The Spirit would come to be permanently amongst the Christian company and to indwell each of them. He is still present with believers today to strengthen their witness and to enable them to withstand this world which remains hostile to God and His people.

The work of the Spirit

The coming of the Spirit would be a direct consequence of Jesus going away to the Father (vv.5-7). We can see the advantages of this now, but just then the disciples did not really grasp it because they were overwhelmed with grief. Jesus reminds them that the Spirit would be

their Helper and then speaks about His other activities as the Spirit of truth. By His coming, He would expose the true nature of the world in a threefold way: "And when He has come He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (v.8). This work continues today in the preaching of the Gospel. First, there is a demonstration of the world's sin: "of sin, because they do not believe in Me" (v.9). In the works and words of the Lord Jesus, there had been the full revelation of God, so much so that the world is now without any excuse for sin. The Lord had already made this plain: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father" (15:22-24).

The Spirit shows to a guilty world man's defiance of God, so that people can repent and find salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. However, if this witness of the Holy Spirit is refused, there is condemnation: "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Unbelief is the ultimate sin!

If the world is so wrong, the next part of the Holy Spirit's work is to prove God is right. "Of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more" (v.10). By its treatment of God's Son, the world has shown that it is not righteous. Not only was the trial, conviction, punishment and crucifixion of Jesus unjust, but

it was publicly voiced with the words, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). By contrast, everything Jesus did was right. He could say, "Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?" (8:46). Only He has lived completely in, and done, God's will. The result of this is that He is now glorified at His Father's right hand, the place of righteousness in an absolute sense. God is right in all that He has done, is doing, and will do through His Son. The Gospel message is about "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...to demonstrate at the present time [God's] righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:24-26).

In v.11, Jesus informs us that the third part of the Holy Spirit's work is to convince the world of its condemnation: "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged". In the Bible, 'the world' is an expression used to describe that society of all peoples without God and in opposition to Him. They have their own plans, pursuits, philosophies, and way of life away from God. They are led by Satan, who is their prince. Jesus gives us God's verdict on such a system: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31).

At the cross, Satan was defeated in every way when he came and "found nothing" in Jesus. Then was he cast out. The Holy Spirit's work is to point out that the world system was condemned at the cross. Judgment is, therefore, inevitable for everyone who is in it, unless they believe on the Son of God. Today, Jesus still says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who

sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24). Meanwhile, the Christian is instructed: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever" (1 John 2:15-17).

*He who does
the will of God
abides for ever*

At that moment, both their separation from the Lord and the ensuing hostility of the world were causing much sorrow to the disciples. However, when Jesus said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now", He was not referring to their distress. Rather it was that they would receive the necessary capacity and ability to learn new truths only from the Holy Spirit. In vv.13-15, the Lord, therefore, returns to the theme of the Holy Spirit's work for them in that new day, when He had gone away to the Father and the Spirit had been given: "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what

is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."

In the workings of the Godhead, there is always unity and harmony. The Son does nothing from Himself; He always operates from His Father, seeing and doing His works (5:19). In like manner, the Spirit of truth, as proceeding from the Father, hears and speaks from Him. He will not speak from Himself. His work is to glorify Christ by showing all that the Father has given into His hands.

The Spirit is also the Teacher, guiding believers into all the truth, and telling them about the future. When we link these verses with 14:26, we see the way God arranged for the writing of the New Testament. The Spirit first of all brought "to remembrance" all the things which Jesus had told His disciples; so we have the four Gospels. He then guided the apostles into "all truth" for the writing of the epistles. Finally, He told them "things to come" for the prophetic portions of the New Testament, especially the book of Revelation.

The meaning of v.15 about everything of the Father being given to the Son and shown to us by the Spirit, we understand to be all the detailed truths about the risen and glorified Christ. For example, Romans is the doctrine of the Gospel; the truth of the Church as Christ's body (the mystery) is revealed in Ephesians; spiritual worship is described in Hebrews, where our Great High Priest is seen within the veil; and the practical precepts of the Christian faith are outlined in the pastoral epistles. Three times in John 14-16, the Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of

truth". He shows the excellencies of the Lord Jesus, who is the Truth (14:6), from the word of God, which is truth (17:17).

The consequence of His going away

Now the point had been reached in the journey from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane where it was necessary for Jesus to talk plainly about the nearness of His separation from the eleven. First of all, there was that "little while" when they would not see Him. That phrase describes the time from His arrest in the garden until His reunion with them following His resurrection. He had to emphasise the real grief they would experience, while the world rejoiced. But as in childbirth, when a woman's pain is soon forgotten by the joy of getting a child, so also the disciples would lose their sorrow and find permanent joy. This joy, which "no one will take from you" (v.22), they received from Him when they saw Him again.

However, He wanted them to grasp that "seeing Him" was more than just meeting Him again on earth after His resurrection. This had come out in v.16: "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." The new day, then, is about seeing Him by faith in His Father's presence.

The Christian's privileges now

But when Jesus said this to His disciples, they were confused and afraid to ask about it. So He underlines to them in v. 23 that a special new day of privilege would begin then: "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you,

whatever you ask the Father in My Name He will give you".

The disciples had been in the habit of asking and receiving from the Lord while He was with them on earth. But from now on, their prayers would go straight to the Father, in the Son's Name. As Christians, we now have this direct access to the Father in prayer for all our needs. Our Lord directs in v.24, "Ask, and you will receive." We can confidently ask "in His name" because we asking for Christ's glory and claiming the full value of that Name to His Father. Because the Father is the great Provider, the promise is that we will receive and that our joy will be full!

Another feature of the new day for the believer is that Jesus can now, as He says in v.25, "tell you plainly about the Father". So we are brought to know all about the Father, and that His love rests upon us. The Lord assures us, "The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God" (v.27). The Father wants those who believe on His Son to be conscious of this great favour of love, and to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

"I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father" (v.28). By His coming, Jesus had made known the Father. In His going back to the Father, He was taking up all things for God as Man, and as Man representing believers there in heaven. This is a "dark saying" for the uninitiated! However, the disciples thought that He was now using plain speech, so they confidently say, "By this we believe that You came forth from God" (v.30). But Jesus cautions them, "Do you now believe?" (v.31). There had

to be that most important event before "that day" of fullest blessing and privilege for believers. It was necessary for the Lord to leave them and face the ordeal of the cross.

V.32 tells what would take place: "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." To go to the Father, He had to go through suffering, pain and death before rising again to ascend to heaven. Here is that deeply moving truth of the joint activity of God the Father and God the Son. They are pictured in Genesis 22 by Abraham and Isaac, who went together to the place of the burnt offering. Throughout Jesus' farewell talk, He presents the cross as a completed fact, but it was a necessary part of the divine counsel: "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8). The Lord laid down His life that He might take it again, as commanded of His Father (10:18). That had now to be faced. His hour had now come!

*In Me
you may have
peace*

Jesus ends this talk to His disciples with words of great comfort and encouragement: "These things have I spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"

(v.33). He knew that the 'in Me...peace' message would strengthen them against the 'in the world...[trouble]' warning. The world today continues to oppose God, so there are still difficulties for the believer to face. These words of Jesus are for believers today, as is His promise: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you...Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (14:27). This means that both the calmness with which He faced the world that night, and the confidence He had in His God and Father, can be ours today.

Conclusion

The resounding battle cry on which we close is that He has the victory! He has

overcome! And He did so at the cross, the place where the world and its ruler thought that they had succeeded by putting Him to death. But He rose again from the dead, has ascended to heaven, and is sat down with His Father on His throne! Because He lives by the power of God, we, today, can face everything in His glorious Name. "And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4,5). May we take heart as He brings to us afresh these words of great encouragement: "Be of good cheer!"



Faithfulness

Donald Hill

'faithful' – loyal, trustworthy, constant.

The word 'faithful' occurs more times in the book of Revelation than in any other Bible book. It shines out there against the dark background of the general unfaithfulness which characterises that book. Let this brief meditation on this important subject search your heart.

Introduction

Faithfulness is a quality which is commendable to the Lord. There are three spheres in which we may demonstrate faithfulness:

- * Faithfulness to the Lord Himself
- * Faithfulness to the unbelieving world
- * Faithfulness to fellow believers on the Lord Jesus.

Scripture provides many illustrations where faithfulness was demonstrated in the lives of both men and women. In the

blessing of the Lord in Nehemiah 9:8, the heart of Abraham is quoted as being faithful before the Lord. God could say of Moses, "who is faithful in all mine house". This statement is also quoted in Hebrews 3:5. In Nehemiah 7:2, Hanani and Hananiah were faithful men who were made responsible for the securing of the city gates at sundown and the opening of those gates at sunrise. Lydia, one of the praying women at Philippi, could say to Paul and Silas, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord" (Acts 16:15). Paul could write, "Timothy

*Faithful
in
all
Mine house*

who is...faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:17). Towards the end of Paul's life, he charged that same Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

The Lord Jesus – the faithful witness

The Lord Jesus Himself is the perfect example of One who was faithful.

"Faithful amidst unfaithfulness,
'Mid darkness only light,
Thou didst Thy Father's name confess,
And in His will delight."

(J.G.Deck)

In the salutation at the beginning of the Revelation, each divine Person is mentioned. And so we read, "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness" (1:5). In the coming kingdom day, faithfulness will be the girdle of His reins, it is said of Him, "And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins". The competence of the Lord Jesus to take up the reins of universal government is because He pos-

sesses the seven fold fullness of the Spirit of Jehovah (Isaiah 11:1-5).

Paul's faithfulness

In Acts 20:17-38, we have an account of Paul's farewell meeting with the Ephesian elders whom he summoned to Miletus. In his address to them, we can see evidence of his faithfulness in the three spheres mentioned above.

1. His service was for his Lord (v.19). He served with humility and faced much adversity. His life was threatened and, though he was in much danger, he did not turn aside. At the end of his life, he could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7,8).
2. He was faithful to the world in his Gospel testimony, stressing the need on the part of both Jews and Gentiles for repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (v.21).
3. He was faithful to believers. Pure from the blood of all men, he had not failed to make known unto them "all the counsel of God" (v.27). Blinded by the brilliance of the light on the Damascus road, he heard the Lord Jesus speaking personally to him. From that day, he handed his life over to the service of the Lord Jesus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Enlightened

by the Holy Spirit as to all the divine truth, he communicated this to his fellow believers, as we see in his epistles. Moreover, he did not fail to warn believers of those enemies who would attack the church both from the outside as also from within. His exhortation was, therefore, “Watch!”

Am I faithful?

In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), one servant gained five talents, and the other, two. Their lord’s commendation to each of them was the same, “Well done, good and faithful servant”. It was not a matter of success, but rather of faithfulness.

*Well done,
good
and faithful
servant*

So the challenge to each of us today, in our respective situations, is, “Am I faithful?”

1. Faithful, first of all, to the Lord Jesus? Am I obedient to His commands, His desires? Do I meet with those who love His Name to remember Him in His death? Are His fea-

tures reflected in my life from day to day?

2. Faithful to the unbelieving world? The Lord Jesus has left us as light bearers in a dark world of sin – “you in your small corner, and I in mine”. Men, women, boys and girls still need to repent and put their trust in the finished work of Christ if they are to be saved. “How shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14).
3. Faithful to my fellow believers, particularly those with whom I meet? Am I there occupying my seat at every opportunity, encouraging those in the gathering? Jonathan had to say to David, “You will be missed, because your seat will be empty” (1 Samuel 20:18).

The days in which Malachi served were not easy ones in which to be faithful. But in those dark days, we read that those who “feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Malachi 3:16). God took account of them and said, “They shall be mine... in that day when I make up my jewels” (v.17).

The days are growing darker. While we wait for the return of God’s Son from heaven, our deliverer from the wrath to the Lord, to the unbelieving world, to fellow believers! The path is not easy – Paul served with many tears (Acts 20:19).

The Two Seeds

Part 1

Ernie Bartlett

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other” (Galatians 5:17). This article traces the remarkable story of the continual conflict between Satan and Christ from its beginnings. “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Overview

The first prophecy in the Bible was given by God Himself to the serpent, Satan: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). It is likely that Adam and Eve also heard these words. Subsequently, Adam called his wife Eve, meaning ‘mother of all living’ (v.20). Prior to this, he had simply called her Woman. It might be thought that Adam would have called her ‘mother of all dying’, for sin had now entered into the world. All future generations would be born in sin and the result would be death by sin. But Adam had faith in a coming Redeemer who would crush Satan. By so doing, the woman’s seed would bring salvation for mankind. Eve, no doubt, kept these words in her heart. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, “I have gotten a man from the LORD” (Genesis 4:1), thinking that Cain was the promised seed. How wrong she was! Satan sought to frustrate the purpose of God by controlling Cain, who “was of that wicked one” (1 John 3:12), resulting in the murder of Abel. But God gave Adam and Eve another son, Seth.

As the centuries rolled by, Satan sought to prevent the promised deliverer from fulfilling God’s purposes. Prior to the flood, man’s iniquity was at an all time high. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...And the LORD said, I will destroy man” (Genesis 6:5,7). The destruction of the whole creation would have frustrated God’s promised salvation. But we read, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (v.8). So the seed of the woman continued through Noah and his son, Shem. We can further trace the seed through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah.

About 150 years after the death of Joseph, the Israelites still being in Egypt, “there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). He commanded his midwives to kill all the Israelite male children at birth (v.16). So again it would appear that the promised seed could not come. But the midwives feared God “and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive” (v.17).

About 600 years went by; Satan was still busy with his evil plans. “But when

Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah” (2 Chronicles 22:10). At this point, it would seem that Satan had now had his way and frustrated the plan of God. But again God steps in. So we read in the next verse, “But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king’s sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bedchamber...And he was with them hid in the house of God six years” (vv.11,12). At the appropriate time, Joash was brought into the temple and anointed king. The people cried, “God save the king.” When Athaliah heard the cry of the people and understood what had happened, she called, “Treason, treason”. Jehoida the priest ordered that she should be slain outside the temple area (ch.23). So another attempt of Satan was frustrated!

Satan had still not given up. Another 300 years passed by. Judah had been taken to Babylon in captivity. Then the Babylonians were overrun by Persia. At this time, a Jewish girl, Esther, was made queen instead of Vashti. Then we are introduced to another of Satan’s servants, Haman, who plans to kill all the Jews. Haman persuades the king to write letters to all the provinces of the kingdom ordering that all Jews should be destroyed (Esther 3:8,9). Again it would seem that Satan had got his way. But Esther, at the risk of her own life, asks the king to spare her people. She denounces Haman’s wicked plans. Haman had already prepared gallows on

which to hang Esther’s uncle, Mordecai. At the command of the king, wicked Haman is hanged on his own gallows.

The time now moves to the New Testament and king Herod. “There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he that is born king of the Jews...When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matthew 2:2,3). Having found out from the chief priests and the scribes where the young Child should be born, Herod asks the wise men to bring him news of the Child so that he might worship Him also. This was a lie, for Herod intended to murder Him. Satan, the father of lies, was behind all this. If the promised seed could be destroyed, then Satan would not be judged.

But God is always one step ahead of the enemy! God speaks to Joseph in a dream and tells him to take the young child and His mother into Egypt. As we read the last chapters of the four Gospels, we see that the purposes of God in redemption were finally fulfilled.

Having taken this broad sweep of the conflict between Satan’s seed and the Seed of the woman, it will now be helpful to look in more detail at some of the principal characters involved in this conflict.

Cain, Abel and Seth

Cain’s offering to God was of the fruit of the cursed ground (Genesis 3:17; 4:3). It represented the toil of his hands. Religious man has not changed. Men will offer to God their labours - their good works, charity, penance, prayers,

church attendance. Many of these things are good in themselves, but none of these things can meet the requirements of a holy God in respect of sin.

Cain’s offering was no doubt very beautiful and colourful – lemons, oranges, grapes, wheat etc. By contrast, Abel’s offering was not pleasant to the human eye. We may all like to see a little lamb with its woolly coat. Abel’s offering was a slain lamb – cut in pieces, its blood shed. But this was the offering which God required. “The LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect” (Genesis 4:4,5).

Cain was angry and upset. “And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin (or a sin offering) lieth at the door” (vv.6,7). There was also a lamb for Cain to offer. If he had done this, he would have been accepted. But Cain rejected that which God provided and killed Abel. God speaks to Cain a second time: “Where is Abel thy brother?” One sin

leads to another. Cain becomes not only a murderer but also a liar. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” he protests. Abel’s blood cried out for *vengeance*. Christ’s blood cries out for *mercy* to the sinner who trusts in Him! Cain went out from the presence of the LORD.

Vv. 17-24 lists the sons of Cain, with their downward spiral of evil. Cain builds a city and calls it after his son, Enoch. How different to the later cities of Israel. Many of these have the name of God in them e.g. Bethel, house of God. A city has walls. Perhaps Cain’s idea was to keep God out. By contrast, Abraham dwelt in tents. “He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

One of Cain’s descendants, Lamech, took two wives – another downward step. It was this practice which later brought unhappiness into the lives of Elkanah and Hannah (1 Samuel 4:4-6). This also marked Solomon in his departure from God. So elders in the New Testament are instructed to be the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2).

*Abel’s blood cried out
for vengeance,
Christ’s blood cries out
for mercy*

Another descendant, Jubal, introduced entertainment as a replacement for divine things. "He was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ" (v.21). Not that music is wrong; it can be used in the service of God. But when it replaces spiritual things, then we have to beware. Paul warns concerning the last days, "Men shall be...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:2,4).

Yet another descendant was Tubal-cain, "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron" (v.22). But with all their skill, these men left God out. God had told Adam to till the ground. The descendants of Cain completely turned away from God.

Amidst this downward spiral of evil, God steps in. Eve now bears another son, Seth. His name means 'an appointed one'. He takes his place in the direct line of the Lord Jesus (Luke 3:38).

Noah

There is a sharp contrast between Cain's son and Seth's son. We have already seen how Cain called his city after his son. Of the birth of Seth's son, we read, "Then began men to call upon (or to call themselves by) the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:26). Sadly, even the descendants of Seth soon began to degenerate. Whatever begins in the Spirit, soon ends up in the flesh. It was so with Solomon. The Galatians did run well. Paul looks back to the time when they would have given their eyes for him, but has to ask, "Who did hinder you?" (Galatians 5:7). So the writer to the Hebrews can remind them of the former days, when they took

joyfully the spoiling of their goods, but now they were in danger of going back to Judaism.

Genesis 6 details Satan's influence in the earth. He was still trying to frustrate the purposes of God by seeking to prevent the Seed of the woman from entering into the world. "The sons of God (fallen angels) saw the daughters of men...they took them wives of all which they chose" (v.2). So the wickedness of man was great in the earth. God, in grief, had to say, "I will destroy man whom I have created" (v.7). How this would have pleased Satan! Then there would be no redeemer, no judgment for Satan. But God always has the last word! "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (v.8). God gave Noah precise instructions concerning the building of the ark. It was not just left to Noah to make it as best he thought! One of the problems with believers today is that they ignore what God has laid down in His word and do what seems best to them. While they may keep some of the instruction of Scripture, much of Paul's teaching is discarded on the grounds that it is only what Paul said.

Noah was not only a builder; he was a preacher. He preached for 120 years with very little to show for it. Only his own family was saved. Men mocked him: "Fancy building a ship! It has never rained up until now." (A mist had gone up to water the earth (Genesis 2:6).) Today people mock when we tell them that the Lord is coming. When the rains came and the fountains of the deep were broken up, the people of Noah's day

realised, albeit too late, that what Noah said was true.

Noah came into the ark by invitation; God said, "Come" (Genesis 7:1). This is still the message of the Gospel (Matthew 11:28-30). Noah and his family were secure, for God shut them in (v.16). So the believer is eternally secure in Christ. Jesus said, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" (John 10:28).

Noah awaited God's time. When he saw signs that the waters were subsiding, he sent forth a raven and a dove. The dove returned; there was no place for her foot to rest. When the dove was sent out a second time, she returned with an olive leaf in her mouth. These were all signs that the judgment on the earth was nearing its conclusion. Likewise, we can see all manner of signs around us: the return of the Jews to Israel; the departure from the faith; conditions in the world. These signs all point to the near return of the Lord, though that return will herald the start of judgment for the world.

When the flood (picture of the Tribulation) was over, God commanded Noah to leave the ark. Noah and his family are delivered and, in thankfulness to God, Noah offers a burnt offering. We, as believers, have also been delivered from the judgment of God. We can say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

God now puts man in responsibility for governing the earth: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6). When Cain killed Abel, Cain's blood was not required.

*God
always has
the
last
word*

Prior to Noah, man was ruled by his conscience. Man's conscience directed his deeds. Today, we are governed not only by conscience, but also by human government. We have kings, judges, police, to establish law and order.

God then made a covenant with Noah. Never again would He destroy the earth by flood. As token of that covenant, God set the rainbow in the sky (vv.11,12). In a coming day, God will judge the earth, not by water, but by fire (2 Peter 3:5-7).

Noah was now living in a new earth, washed clean of its sin, as it were. It might be thought that he was living in ideal conditions. There was only he and his family to please God. Like many examples we have in Scripture, Noah began in the Spirit but ended in the flesh. He became drunk (Genesis 9:21). So we have the New Testament exhortation: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

Not only was he drunk, but he was naked in his tent. Ham saw his father's naked-

ness and told his brothers. Then we read, "And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father...And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren" (vv.23-25). Why Canaan? It was Ham, Canaan's father who looked on the nakedness of his father. Since then, the land of Canaan has been possessed by many nations: Israel, Greeks, Romans, Turks, Britain. All these are descendants of Japheth and Shem. Canaan is where the greatest conflict in the world took place, that between Christ and Satan at Calvary. It was there that our Lord was crucified; it was there that Satan was defeated.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah

The sons of Noah repopulated the earth. Ham and his seed inhabited Asia and Africa. Japheth inhabited Europe. Shem went south to Ur of the Chaldees. So we are introduced to Abraham.

God calls Abram out of that place to a land which God would later show him. So he goes, taking with him his nephew, Lot. Because of the strife between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot, they separate from each other. Lot goes to Sodom; Abram dwells in the land of Canaan. Then God promises Abram a land, later described as flowing with milk and honey. Its borders ran from the river Nile to the Euphrates. The land was promised not only to Abram but to his seed also (Genesis 13:14-18).

At this time, Sarai was barren. She becomes impatient and gives Hagar, her handmaid, to Abram so that she might bear a son instead. God promises that Sarah (by this time, her name has been changed) shall bear a son, Isaac. So Isaac was born and grew. When Sarah saw Hagar's son mocking, she told Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son" (Genesis 21:10). Paul takes this up in Galatians where he compares the bondwoman's son with Judaism and the freewoman's son, Isaac, with the Church.

Isaac is also a type of Christ, both in His death and resurrection and also as the Bridegroom (Ephesians 5:25). Like his predecessors, he began in the Spirit and ended in the flesh. He was more concerned with his savoury meat than with the purposes of God: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Romans 9:13). Jacob obtains the birthright but only through deceit. Jacob flees to his uncle Laban who deceives him into marrying Leah, though Jacob's heart was for Rachel. He afterwards marries Rachel but she is barren. She gives her maid, Bilhah to Jacob, then afterwards conceives herself.

In all, Jacob has twelve sons, his favourite being Joseph. No fault is recorded of Joseph and, as such, he is a beautiful type of Christ. The promised seed, however, is not through Joseph, but through Judah. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Genesis 49:10).

themselves, were not fatal. But the constant pain forced the dying men to... The spectators... priests had passed... that part of his crime was saying that... destroyed he could raise it in three days... Jesus looked like any other pain-r... ever seen. To the casual viewer there was nothing different about him, or unusual.

The Day Christ Died

by Jim Bishop

Like the others', his head at times was lowered, with chin touching chest. Again, moved by sudden spasms, his head tossed from one shoulder to the... directly up into the sun as his lip sagged, in fatigue, its weight hung and his knees bent far forward.

His arms were now in a V po conscious of two unendurable cir that the pain in his wrists was l muscle cramps knotted his forearm pads of his shoulders; the seco muscles at the sides of his chest we This induced in him an involuntar while he could draw air into his l exhale.

At once, Jesus raised himself o weight of his body came down on pressed hard against the top of th Jesus was forced to raise hims moment, his head hid the sign whi his shoulders were on a level with rapid and easier. Like the other tw feet in order to breathe rapidly f unable to bear the pain below, whi and wrung moans from the stro lower and lower, and his knees p until, with a deep sigh, he felt his wrists. And this process must hav again.

the pain. Cupping his hands, one yelled at Jesus: 'You are the one that can pull down the sanctuary and lift it up in three days!' This savage sarcasm was appropriate because every time the body of Jesus sagged, it looked as though he could hardly lift himself up again.

Another shouted: 'Help yourself if you are the Son of God, and come down from the cross!'

There was no reply from the cross. Caiaphas sneered as he said loudly: 'He helped others! He cannot help himself!' Others in the small select group of priests joined in the cry: 'He is the king of Judea; let him this instant come down from the cross, and we will believe in him!' (Lord, give us a sign!) 'He trusts in God; let God deliver him if he cares for him. Did he not say, "I am the Son of God"?' One of the soldi joined in the taun of the cross, and, the agonized face Jews, then save y

A woman tol to see. He look no clouds. But th a deeper blue. T sudden thing; the robin's egg blue

The people fo and many in the storm was comit hurried towards their heads and before the storm There was no flashes. There w could be stard until the darknes The people w

And some, calmer than others, said that it must be a gigantic dust storm which had flung millions of tons of sand between the land and the sun. But others said that even the oldest

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ISBN 0-340-74600-9
published by
Hodder & Stoughton
£5.99
plus postage & packing

Drawing on his experience as a journalist, historian and, most importantly, as a sincere believer, Jim Bishop wrote this book with a strong personal mission: to gain a clearer picture of Jesus, the Man, during the time that He chose to suffer as a Man, and to better understand the strength of His relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The result is a remarkable hour-by-hour account of the crucifixion.

My Lord and I

I have a Friend so precious, so very dear to me,
He loves me with such tender love, He loves so faithfully.
I could not live apart from Him, I love to feel Him nigh;
And so we dwell together, my Lord and I.

Sometimes I'm faint and weary, He knows that I am weak,
And as He bids me lean on Him, His help I gladly seek.
He leads me in the paths of light, beneath a sunny sky,
And so we walk together, my Lord and I.

I tell Him all my sorrows, I tell Him all my joys,
I tell all that pleases me, I tell Him what annoys;
He tells me what I ought to do, He tells me what to try,
And so we walk together, my Lord and I.

He knows how much I love Him, He knows I love Him well;
But with what love He loveth me, no tongue can ever tell.
It is an everlasting love, in ever rich supply,
And so we love each other, my Lord and I.

He knows how I am longing some weary soul to win;
And so He bids me go and speak a loving word for Him.
He bids me tell His wondrous love and why He came to die,
And so we work together, My Lord and I.

He tells me of His kingdom, it is not far away;
And, oh! His heart is longing to take me there some day.
Immortal joys are waiting, and joys that never die;
Soon there we'll reign together, my Lord and I.

*(Words of a hymn sung in the rocks and caves of France during the
fierce persecution of the Huguenots, 400 years ago)*