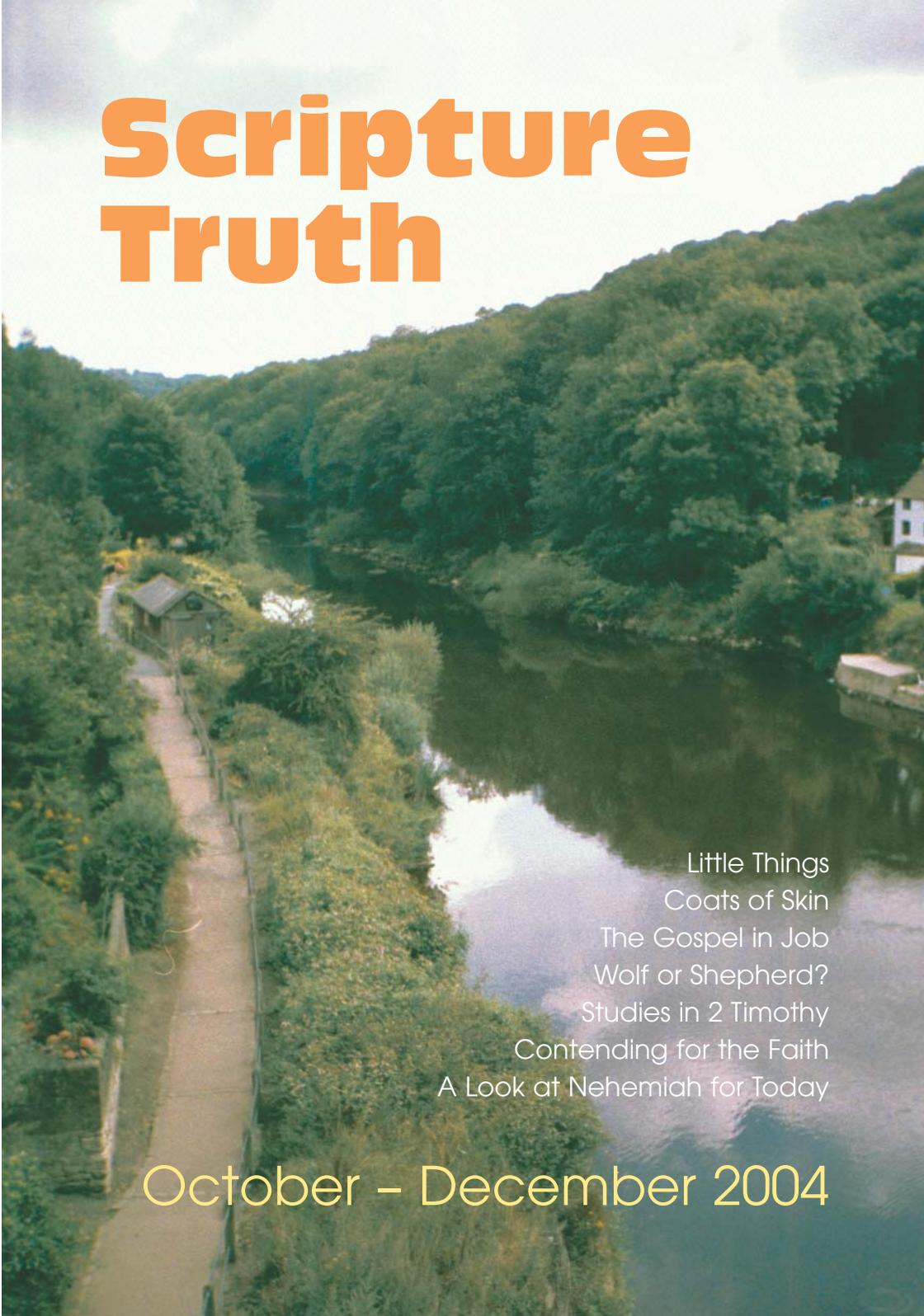


# Scripture Truth



Little Things  
Coats of Skin  
The Gospel in Job  
Wolf or Shepherd?  
Studies in 2 Timothy  
Contending for the Faith  
A Look at Nehemiah for Today

October – December 2004

# 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”.

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# Contending For The Faith

J.N.Shepherd

*The writer recently went to be with his Lord after many years of faithful and fruitful service. This article is published to mark the occasion. It is based on an address given at a YPCC conference and first appeared in Scripture Truth some 30 years ago. His characteristic expressions ‘supremely important’ and ‘wonderful’ will be readily recognised here.*

## Contending for the faith

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares...ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3,4).

From the beginning, Satan has tried to destroy the line by which the Saviour would come into the world. Since the Lord went back to glory, those attacks have been directed against His people. These have often been by bringing persecution against them, but a far more subtle form is to attack the Faith, through evil men crept in unawares into the Christian company. These are not converted men; they are ungodly men who deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. The epistle of Jude was written to warn us about these attacks. This was not, apparently, Jude’s first intention in writing. He was going to write about the common salvation, but he was diverted from his purpose, in view of these men who had crept in.

## The faith once delivered

“The faith once delivered to the saints” is of such supreme importance that we are called to contend for it. ‘The Faith’ here speaks of that great body of Christian doctrine – the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the fact of the Lord’s coming here in love, God and Man in one blessed Person; the facts of His going to the cross for our salvation, of His bodily resurrection from the grave, of His ascension and glorification on high, of His soon coming – first for His own and then to reign. These are not our opinions; they are the *facts* which constitute the Faith. We are called to contend for the whole body of these things. They are absolutely vital; they have come from God.

The opponents of the Faith are those who have turned “the grace of our God into lasciviousness”. They have also denied “the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ”. It is really rebellion against the Lordship of Christ, the essence of Christianity. “...there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts” (v.18). These words certainly apply to our times. “These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit” (v.19). This apparently means that they

exalt themselves along the lines of the Pharisees. How supremely important it is that we should realise that they have not the Spirit of Christ and are none of His.

### Your most holy faith

“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (vv.20,21). Here are four disciplines which will fit us to contend for the faith.

*“building up yourselves on your most holy Faith.”* How much time do we spend building ourselves up in relation to earthly things? There is only one way of being prosperous as a Christian, and that is to spend your life in the blessed Word of God.

*“praying in the Holy Ghost.”* All true prayer is in the Holy Ghost. Only what comes from Him is acceptable to God. I cannot ask God for just anything I like, but God has committed Himself to answering and doing what is prayed in the Spirit and is, therefore, according to His will.

*“keep yourselves in the love of God.”* We are in that place, and what a wonderful place to be! And we can keep ourselves consciously there through prayer. Nothing so fits us to meet the attacks of the enemy as the sense of God’s love personally upon us.

*“looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”* This is the future sense of eternal life. We are just about to see the Saviour, and we are to look on and up to heaven in the light of that coming moment.

“And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (vv.22,23). These words refer primarily to those who have been seduced by these evil teachers. Some need to be treated with compassion, but others, like Lot, have to be pulled out of the fire.

### Able to keep

“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” (vv.24,25). How wonderful to be able to end on these words! You might say, “I know I am going to fall in something today. But it’s only to be expected.” Oh, no it is not! Although we have no strength in ourselves, there is absolutely no reason why any Christian should ever fall! Why? Because we have One who is able to keep us from falling! And to Him there rises a paean of praise – glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever!

*We are just about to see the Saviour*

# A Look At Nehemiah For Today

## Part I Nehemiah – the troubled man (ch.1)

Ted Murray

We welcome this first article of a new series on Nehemiah. It is a follow-up to the series on Ezra which appeared in Scripture Truth earlier. “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning that we through the patience (endurance) and comfort (encouragement) of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

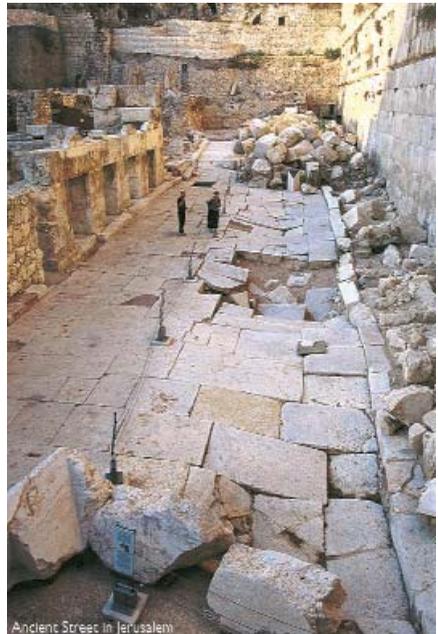
### *A man with a mission*

#### Introduction

Nehemiah is introduced to us as the man who succeeds Ezra. His book is the sequel to Ezra and, for a long time, was reckoned as the second part of the one book. The division of the Hebrew Scriptures was only made in the 16th century. The Hebrew Bible of Daniel Bomberg, printed in Venice in 1535, was the first to show a division of the two books. The Geneva Bible (1560) also shows separate books.

The book tells of events that occurred between the years 445 – 432 B.C., approximately. It brings before us not only a man with a mission but also a man concerned about the well being of his brethren. His mission was to bring security to his brethren and a return to living in accordance with God’s word.

Some 10 years after the commencement of Ezra’s work, there was considerable opposition to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (see Ezra 4:7-24). As a result, the walls of Jerusalem were completely



Ancient Street in Jerusalem

razed, the doors broken down and burned, and the people suffered further persecution. It was this sorry scene that was presented to Nehemiah as the book opens. Little wonder that he was deeply troubled!

Breakdown was very evident. The people of God were demoralised; the testimony was in disarray. There were, however, a few who were very concerned about the state of affairs and were prepared to do something about it. Today, as we look around us in Christendom, we are also troubled by the state of things. The testimony to Christ, of which we are a part, is in disarray. The authority of God's word is being set aside in favour of more politically correct opinions. Infighting and intrigue are prevalent amongst the people of God, resulting in abject weakness and a decline in numbers. Is it sufficient to say to ourselves, "It is a day of small things. We should be satisfied with the things that remain."? Or should we, like Nehemiah of old, be concerned and be people with a mission?

### Nehemiah's sad news

The chapter opens by giving Nehemiah's credentials. It then briefly describes a visit to Nehemiah by his brother, Hanani, and some of the men from Judea. In Hebrew, Nehemiah means 'Jehovah is comfort' and Hanani means 'gracious'. Hanani was, as we can see, a man who was concerned about two problems: he had a care for his brother's welfare; he was also concerned about the situation in Jerusalem. In fact, we see here both an individual and a collective care for the welfare of the people who had been left in Jerusalem, exposed to all manner of influences from around as well as from within.

These men could have had their prayer meeting in Jerusalem and left the situation with the Lord. They, however, went a step further. They went to see Nehemiah, a man who had the wherewithal to do something about their situation. What an example they are for the assemblies of today. There are times when the solution to a problem is in the realms of our ability and our resources but, because of pride, prejudice and selfishness, we avoid these means of solving our problems.

From the result of the meeting with Nehemiah, it would appear that the visitors kept nothing back. They did not put on a brave face; they stated the naked truth. Things were desperate. The people who were left in Jerusalem were in great distress – they suffered reproach from all around and had no security.

The times in which we live are not so different from those of Nehemiah's day. This country has turned its back on Christianity. Attempts are being made to do away with a daily Christian service or assembly in our schools. If the school is a church school, then the governors can retain the right to hold a time of worship. Humanism is taught as part of comparative religious studies. The children are to

know about, but not be taught, Christianity. In church life, too, the world has made its inroads, influencing attitudes, manners and deportment. The walls and gates, as it were, are in ruins, and we see the consequences.

The problem is that many of us are unaware of the situation in which we find ourselves. It is prevalent in our lives as individuals and also in our relationships with those with whom we claim to be in practical Christian fellowship, yet we disregard their concerns in matters of testimony and association.

### Nehemiah's prayer (vv.4-7)

Nehemiah is deeply affected by the sad news he receives. He sits down, reflects on what he has heard, then weeps and prays, as did Ezra before him, to "the God of heaven" (v.4). He realises that God's throne was no longer on earth but removed to heaven and that God's influence had been cast aside. In deep humiliation, he confesses his sin and that of the people. "We have sinned against Thee: both I and my father's house have sinned," he cries. He goes a step further stating, "We have acted very wickedly." Nehemiah was deeply moved by the conditions of the breakdown.

Nehemiah's attitude is in marked contrast to the Pharisaic attitude which is sometimes seen in the assembly today. Many of us are aware of the breakdown. We are apt to wring our hands, lamenting that things are in a poor condition. But we are not prepared to admit that these conditions are the result of our failure to maintain the testimony which has been passed down by faithful men of God in past generations. When was the last time that we used words similar to Nehemiah's and accepted that we have sinned and acted corruptly?

### Nehemiah's faith (vv.8-11)

Just as we have seen the contrition of Nehemiah, so also we see his faith. These two attributes seem to go hand in hand. Ezra (see Ezra 9) and Daniel (see Daniel 9) were men who acted similarly. Now Nehemiah goes on to remind God of His own words: "Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses" (see Leviticus 26:40-45; Deuteronomy 4:23; 30:1-6). Even if, because of their transgressions, His people had been scattered into a stranger's land, God had promised that, if they repented, He would bring them back to the place which He had chosen for them. This was the place where God had chosen "to set His name there", a place where He was to be honoured and worshipped.

We now see the selfless side of Nehemiah. When approaching God in repentance, he involved himself, his family and the people. But now, as he asks for blessing, it is for these, "Your servants and Your people" (v.10). Those people were His

*Your servants who desire to fear Your name*

redeemed. They had experienced the great power of God, not only in their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, but also from the bondage of Babylon.

This surely reminds us of our Lord Jesus Christ and His prayer in John 17. There He prays for His own who are in the world “that they may behold My glory”. What a contrast from the ruin all around – to see His glory, to be occupied with that which is His by right! What a joy that will be in that day when we see Him as He is (1 John 3:2)! But what about today, the day in which we live? How much time do we devote to dwelling on the moral, personal, redemptive and official glories of the Lord Jesus Christ? Remember, He is Lord of all!

What comfort it must have been to Nehemiah as he reminded himself before God of that great work that God had done for the nation. By faith, Nehemiah was expecting great and mighty acts by God once more. Only when Nehemiah has made intercession for the people, “Your servants who desire to fear Your name”, do we find him pleading for mercy for himself. Nehemiah was cupbearer to the great and mighty potentate, Artaxerxes, who, at a whim, took the lives of men and women who failed to please him. Yet Nehemiah calls him “this man” (v.11)! Artaxerxes was a man of little consequence in comparison to the mighty God in whom Nehemiah trusted! We, too, should take heart when the fear of men takes hold of our lives. Then we need to remind ourselves of the Lord’s servant, Nehemiah, and others like him down the pages of history, who, although giving due respect to the position that God gives to rulers, realised that the Lord is in overall control.

It seems as if Nehemiah has already made up his mind as to what his plan of action is to be. Knowing the power of the king, he asks the Lord to prosper this day and to grant mercy in the sight of “this man”. Chapter 2 declares how Nehemiah’s request was granted. Nehemiah prayed in faith. We, too, should remember when we pray that we exercise faith in our great, omnipotent and compassionate Lord. Let us keep this in mind as we keep on praying!



# Studies In 2 Timothy

## Chapter 2 – Last counsel for godly service

Jonathan Hughes

*The counsel which Paul was able to give to his young son in the faith, Timothy, for the difficult days in which he lived, is all the more relevant for Christians today. We need to listen to it and act upon it. This article is based on a talk given on London's Premier Christian Radio.*

### Introduction

'Faithful' – to be trusted, reliable, based upon firm conviction; so runs the dictionary definition of a word that could especially be associated with 2 Timothy 2. Faithfulness is a much undervalued commodity in today's society. I remember, when I was just a child, hearing it said about certain individuals, usually elderly Christian ladies, that they were faithful. They were always there, always to be relied upon. To a child, it wasn't the most exciting characteristic; it was almost as if, when there was nothing more important to say about someone, then faithfulness was the safety net! Now, if I could have just one wish, it would be that people could say of me that I am faithful – a faithful husband, father, employee, friend, servant of Christ.

In the Lord's parable of the talents, those servants were not commended for how much they had done. No, the commendation was, "Well done, good and *faithful* servant" (Matthew 25:14-30). Victorious Christian living has great value, gifts are great, but faithfulness far exceeds them all. In Hebrews 11, upon the walls of the art gallery of the faithful, as it were, are the words, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (v.13).

In 2 Timothy 2, then, this last counsel of Paul for godly service, the overriding theme is faithfulness.

### Faithful in individual responsibility (vv.1,2)

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (vv.1,2).

Paul had had so much to say to Timothy. Some was concerning the truth, some concerning others, but now he has something for Timothy himself. "Regardless of what

*Well done, good and faithful servant*

others do, Timothy, you be strong!” For Timothy then, as for us today, there is a spiritual war going on, far more deadly, far more serious than any war on terrorism. It is a war in which the devil doesn’t take prisoners. The war is won! But the battle for the lives and souls of each of us still goes on. So Paul would say to us today, “Be strong! Don’t give up!”

But we are not to be strong in our self-confidence and our abilities. They are bound to fail, sooner or later. No, it is to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. “Grace here has its simplest theological meaning, as the divine help, the unmerited gift of assistance that comes from God” (Dr. John White). In our own spiritual battles, when others may desert us and we find ourselves all alone, when temptation rages strong, it is this divine help, this unmerited gift of assistance from God that is enough for us, if we are not too big to accept it.

Now Timothy was to take what had been entrusted to him and pass this on to others. This faithful teaching of the absolute truth of God was not to be left to chance but, with care and diligence, was to be handed on. Who are the witnesses Paul speaks of in v.2? We are not told, but Paul’s words are a solemn reminder that what we say and do is so often seen by others. Younger Christians may look at me to see if what I say retains any weight because of what I do. Non-Christian colleagues at work watch to see if Jesus has any relevance to the workplace today.

This handing on is vital for every generation. It was to be to those who were faithful and able to teach. It is sad to think that, so soon after the birth of the Church, Paul had to distinguish between those believers who were faithful, and those who were not. What may have been just a trickle in the first century has become a flood in the twenty-first! God’s word is unchanging and the truth it declares is immovable. The situations in which we apply it may vary from one generation to the next, and from one culture to another. When my beliefs and actions and God’s word oppose each other, then I can either attempt to change His word or His word can change me! Faithfulness follows the latter course, although it is immensely harder.

**The faithful servant (vv.3-10)**

“Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (v.10).



In vv.3-10, Paul introduces us to three pictures of a faithful servant. None of them involves an easy life, a cost-free Christianity. In the picture of the soldier, Paul introduces the element of endurance. It is not for a soldier to pick and choose which battles he fights, or to quit when he has had enough. Those decisions are just not his to make. We may wish that we had been born at a different time, perhaps to be part of a large Christian

*His  
word  
can  
change  
me!*

revival. What matters to the Lord, however, is how we respond in the circumstances in which He has called us to serve.

So in v.3, Paul writes, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”. The thought behind the words ‘endure hardship’ is take your share of suffering. There can be no getting away from the fact that to live in a way that pleases Jesus means suffering. Sometimes it may seem endless, overwhelming. Perhaps today you are sharing in this suffering. Don’t give up! You are not alone; this is what God has allowed for you. Give Him thanks for it and the victory is assured. There is nothing the devil can do to the child of God who prays and praises even in the midst of suffering. We all long for quiet times and easy days, and they will come. But for now, “endure hardship”.

One of the great differences between God and the devil is this: God is all-powerful; the devil is not! If every Christian was true to Christ, and took their share of suffering, then the load would ease for some. Conversely, if I give up to the siren voice of compromise, then one of my brothers or sisters will suffer that bit more.

Just outside Washington D.C. lies the battlefield of Manassas. During 1862, Northern hopes of a quick end to the American civil war ended. Stonewall Jackson’s flank march with a small army held off a superior Northern force until General Lee arrived. At that time, so many of the Northern forces were just sitting around sunbathing and repairing boots, waiting to be committed to the action, whilst their comrades were being cut down by this small force. If only they had been deployed straight away, years of war might have been avoided!

But that is history. We live now and so much is still at stake – lives to be won for Christ; His word to be put into practice; His honour to be maintained. Today, we need Christians to be committed, fully following His word, supporting one another in this spiritual fight. If we learn nothing else from history, it is what could have been, but wasn’t!

The second picture is that of the athlete. In ancient Greece, strict rules governed the athletes, not only during the games themselves, but also during training. For example, each athlete had to complete at least ten months training before entering the Olympic games. Not to do so would lower the standard of the games. The victory crown is assured to all those who serve Jesus, but we do need to examine our lives carefully to see whether His word really does control our service for Him. It is not just what we do for

Jesus that matters, but how we do it that counts. To serve Him in a way that does not agree with His word just lowers the quality of Christian service.

The final picture is that of the farmer. Hard work, continual toil, is what characterises the farmer. “First come the lessons, then the fun” ran the line in a favourite children’s story. In today’s instant society, so often we want the blessings of Christianity now without being prepared first to pay the cost.



Before moving to the next section, it is worth highlighting the different names Paul uses for Jesus. When he has in view the Man on earth who is now in heaven, Paul uses the term Jesus Christ (vv.3,8). However, when Paul is considering the One who left heaven to come as a Man upon earth, he uses Christ Jesus (v.10).

### A faithful God (vv.11-13)

“For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (vv.11-13).

Some see these words as part of an early Christian hymn. As we came to faith in Christ, our old sinful nature died. So Paul could write to the Galatians, “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). What we give up on the one hand, God more than gives back. So we have a new life in Christ. As we endure suffering on His behalf, we can find help in the promise that one day we shall reign with Him. But sadly, there are times when, like Peter, we may deny Him, in word or in action. This is not a light matter. At the judgment seat of Christ, there will be a reckoning for this disobedience. However, the bottom line is that, even should we become as one without faith, yet He will remain faithful to what He has said.

Let us be quite clear as we read these verses that, as to our salvation, once we are saved nothing can ever alter that. We can never be lost, even should we backslide to the point of living as an unbeliever. Why? Because our salvation depends upon what He has done for us, and He remains faithful. If, as here, we are considering our service, then it is possible to arrive in heaven empty handed, as it were, due to a life of self-pleasing. We cannot then expect His commendation and reward. There can be few things worse than realising, too late, what we have forfeited for eternity because, for a few brief years, we frittered away our time in living for ourselves.

### Faithful words (vv.14-18)

“Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers” (v.14).

As we read the history of the Israelites in the Old Testament, we might wonder how they could have been so foolish. They had so much going for them, and yet they made mistake after mistake. It's good that God's love is so infinite! But as we look at the history of the Church, we realise that, with infinitely greater promises, we have made an equal mess of things. So often it has come down to words – over-emphasising one part of His word, disregarding another, making sure that my views are the most loudly proclaimed.

We should not, of course, compromise what Scripture teaches for the sake of outward calm. If only we all more closely allowed His word to mark our lives, both individually and collectively! Sometimes, however, we are so sure that our position is the only right one that we forsake what His word actually teaches, and substitute our words. The Greek word for ‘ruin’ in v.14 is ‘katastrophe’. The damage we have done to one another, and to the honour of Christ, is nothing short of catastrophe – so needless, so sinful.



Instead of such negative actions, Paul urges Timothy to be diligent in rightly dividing the word of truth (v.15). Let these words encourage us to be wholehearted in reading, and understanding, without preconditions, what His word has to say to us. One can only wonder what Hymenaeus and Philetus (vv.17,18) will say to God as they stand before Him and give an account of their words, and the effect they had on some of His precious children!

### Faithful actions (vv.19-26)

In this final section, we shall consider faithful actions, those acts that honour God and come from a right understanding of His word.

“Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and “Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity”” (v.19). These words are probably taken from Numbers 16:5 and Isaiah 52:11. They provide the sure basis for every believer. God knows each one who has turned to Him in faith but, having done so, the only fitting response is to forsake sinful living.

Paul backs this up with a picture. In a great house, there are precious objects, made from beautiful materials, but there are also cheap objects, made from everyday materials. Some would see in these words a statement of what God has done for us. He has made us like those precious vessels. Others suggest that this has to do with our actions. Right living makes us like precious vessels, while living to please ourselves makes us like vessels of clay. There is truth in both these views. God has made us precious to Himself. How could we be otherwise, when we cost Him His Son? But as such, we are to live up to our calling, to act like a golden bowl, ready to pour out on those around us the blessing of God.

By sad contrast, King Belshazzar used the golden vessels from the temple to make himself and his lords drunk (see Daniel 5). He made those precious vessels base. Sometimes we are in danger of doing just that – as we exercise insufficient control over what we watch and listen to on television, or as we get angry behind the wheel of our car. God has made us the best, His children; now we need to live up to the expectation He has for us.

As Paul closes the chapter, he gives instruction as to how we can do this. It is not so much a case of knowing what we must not do, but rather so filling our time that we have no time left to do what is wrong. If my mind is so full of thinking what to say to a neighbour about Christ, or of another preaching engagement, then I will have less time to think about the wrongs somebody may have done me. If I am so busy visiting the ill or the housebound, then I will have little time left to watch what is unprofitable. And covering all these faithful actions is a sense of humility (v.25). Anything good in me is as a result of what He has given me and done in me.

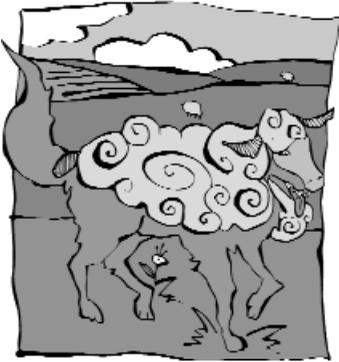
It is fitting to conclude with v.10. Let these words guide each of us until He comes again for us: “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”.

# Wolf Or Shepherd?

Donald Hill

*As members of the flock of God, we are objects not only of the loving care of the Lord Jesus that would gather us to Himself, but also of Satan's efforts to destroy the flock. In turn, each of us is able to act in ways which will either promote the well-being of the flock of God or lead to its scattering. Read this challenging article.*

## Introduction



The characteristic features of the wolf are dismissed in few words by both the Lord Jesus and by Paul the Apostle. In the well-known discourse in John 10, in which the Lord Jesus speaks of Himself characteristically as the Good Shepherd, five words only are needed to describe the work of the wolf: “The wolf...scattereth the sheep” (v.12). In Acts 20, we find Paul, with his shepherd heart, calling the Ephesian elders together to Miletus, so that he might bid them a final farewell on his way to imprisonment in Rome. He has to warn them, “I know this, that after my departing shall

grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (v.29).

It is, therefore, abundantly clear that, from very early days in the Church's history, the work of the enemy has been to make inroads into the flock of God and scatter them. In marked contrast, however, when we view the activities of the One described in Scripture as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20), and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), we find Him gathering His sheep. John's inspired comment on the cynical words of Caiaphas demonstrate the character of the work which the Lord Jesus came to do and would do still: “...it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also *He should gather together in one* the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:50-52). With this in mind, then, it is interesting to note those occasions when we find Him gathering His scattered sheep.

Just prior to the crucifixion, we are told in two of the Gospels, “Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled” (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50). Did the Lord Jesus abandon them in return? No! How lovely it is to find Him in resurrection

re-gathering His scattered flock. Prior to His death, he had already told them, “But after I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee” (Mark 14:28). That same message was repeated by the angel who kept watch over His empty tomb (Matthew 28:7). But, prior to that meeting in Galilee, there are several precious occasions when He would first gather His scattered sheep.

### **The meeting with Mary of Magdala**

“Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping” (John 20:10,11).

Peter and John had already left the scene. Only Mary stands outside the empty sepulchre weeping. She had real affection for the Lord Jesus. But He had an even deeper affection for her! The risen Lord revealed Himself to her and gave her a wonderful message to carry to His disciples: “Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God” (John 20:17). A new link, a new relationship, had been established with His disciples as a result of the Lord’s death and resurrection.

## *A new link, a new relationship*

### **Jesus appears to His fearful disciples**

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you” (John 20:19).

On the evening of that first Lord’s Day, the Lord Jesus brought a message of peace to fearful disciples gathered behind locked doors. In no way could those locked doors prevent His meeting with them! The absence of Thomas is particularly noted.

### **On the Emmaus road**

“Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them” (Luke 24:15).

Here were two disciples travelling away from Jerusalem, the divinely appointed centre at that time, to Emmaus, a distance of some seven to eight miles. Their conversation, centring on the recent events in Jerusalem concerning the Lord Jesus, only brought sadness to their hearts. Jesus drew near and listened to their sad story. Little did they realise that He was central to the whole matter! Then it was His turn to speak. His unfolding of the Old Testament scriptures centred on His suffering and glory and caused their heart to burn. In the home, Jesus was

recognised, whereupon He left. The Shepherd had re-gathered two more of His flock! In the joy of that experience, they retraced their steps to bring the news to the eleven disciples in Jerusalem.

*Not even one sheep would be left  
outside the flock of this Shepherd!*

### Jesus appears to His disciples a second time

“And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing” (John 20:26,27).

News of the risen Christ had been communicated to Thomas. But in reply, Thomas had said, “Except I...see...I will not believe” (v.25). Now for Thomas’ especial benefit, the Lord Jesus comes on this second occasion. Not even one sheep would be left outside the flock of this Shepherd! Jesus’ words to Thomas prompt his wonderful confession, “My Lord and my God”.

Jesus goes on to say to Thomas, “Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (v.29). Later on, Peter would write to the suffering believers who had been scattered far and wide, “Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love” (1 Peter 1:7,8). Then, as now, the Great Shepherd, is taking steps to re-gather His scattered flock. Are we happy today to be found amongst those described by the Lord as so blessed. We have not seen the Lord Jesus but, in the wonderful grace of God, we have believed!

### Events in Galilee

“After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias” (John 21:1).



Peter, as ever in the forefront, tells six other disciples that he is returning to his fishing in the Sea of Galilee. He was giving up on following the Lord! They agree to join him, but their night's activity resulted in empty nets: "That night they caught nothing" (v.3). All efforts outside the Master's will are fruitless.

But the Lord Jesus had not given up on Peter and those other disciples! The presence of the risen Christ on the shore of Galilee made all the difference although, at that time, He was not recognised by them. When they acknowledged that they hadn't any food, Jesus gave instructions to cast the net. This time, there was a wonderful catch of fish. After they had brought the catch ashore, the Lord Jesus invited these tired, cold and hungry disciples to breakfast. So the Saviour would once more re-gather His scattered flock. They recognised Him.



Following this, Peter's restoration takes place. This was the Peter who had failed his Master three times, denying Him with oaths and curses. Yet in tender grace, the Lord commits to Peter the lambs of His flock, together with the sheep, asking him to feed and care for them.

### Wolf or shepherd?

The few incidents we have looked at clearly demonstrate the deep desire of the Lord Jesus to gather His flock together. His Shepherd character was, indeed, foretold by the prophet, Isaiah, some 700 years before it was so beautifully demonstrated to men. Thus, in Isaiah 40, we read, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (v.11).

What a Shepherd! He has left us an example that we should follow His steps (1 Peter 2:21). In these last and closing days of the history of the Church, wouldn't it be lovely if, instead of showing features of the wolf, the features of the Great Shepherd were more clearly seen amongst us. Then would we see gathering unto Him and not scattering. The flock needs spiritual food; it needs those who will be gatherers, giving comfort and guidance. "Seeing that you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Peter 1:22).



# Coats of Skin

David Hill

*How glad we can be that our approach to God does not depend on what we can bring to Him, but rather on what He has provided for us in Christ! Enjoy this brief meditation.*

## God's provision

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skin and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21, JND trans.).

Whenever we turn to the book of Genesis, thoughts are found which develop as we proceed through the scriptures. The object of this article is to suggest one or two lines of meditation upon God's provision after man's sinful fall.

The moment man sinned, he was aware of his nakedness and endeavoured by his own works to effect a remedy (Genesis 3:7). How common this is today! It is not only the Jews who go about seeking to establish their own righteousness. Paul's condemnation of them in Romans 10:3 is equally applicable to many today: “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God”.

Adam soon learned that the apron he made of fig leaves was useless in the presence of God and that even the trees could not conceal him from God's all-seeing eye. The divine provision is coats of skin suggesting, as it does, the death of a substitute.



## A coat for adornment

The word used for 'coats' is not the usual word, often translated as 'robe' or 'garment' in the Old Testament. It is, however, the same word as is used of Joseph's many coloured coat (Genesis 37:3), of Aaron's embroidered priestly coat (Exodus 28:4), and of the “garment of divers colours” worn by King David's daughters (2 Samuel 13:18). Thus we see that what is suggested in Genesis 3 is not merely covering but actual adornment – a coat that sets forth something of the dignity of the wearer.

Joseph's coat signified his special place in the affections of his father as his beloved son. We, too, have been brought into the realm of the Father's love because we have affection



for Christ His Son (John 16:27, JND trans.). The measure of that love towards us is that of His love for the Son (John 17:23) and of the Son's love for us (John 15:9). The infinite grace that found us in our sin has suited us to share in all the boundless affections of God who is love.

### A coat for God's presence



In Exodus, not only Aaron but also his sons have coats. If man was to approach God in priestly service, he must be clothed in the embroidered coat made of fine linen – the righteousnesses of the saints (Revelation 19:8). It was the first garment put on after washing and spoke of the priest's moral suitability to stand in the presence of God, rather than his work of bearing the people before God. That work was seen in the names of the twelve tribes

written on the breastplate and shoulders of the High Priest. The work of Christ has not merely covered our sin, but has bestowed upon us a garment that speaks of what is becoming to His presence.

In Genesis 3, the coats were made of skin. The most frequent use of this word relates to the skins that were used for the covering of the Tabernacle. There are two references to the skin in the offerings. In the sin offering, the skin was to be burned – wholly consumed, outside the camp in a clean place (Leviticus 4:11,12). By contrast, the skin of the burnt offering was to be given to the priest “for himself” (Leviticus 7:8).

In the sin offering, the sins of the offerer are transferred to the offering by his laying hands on it. All that we were and all that characterised us has been removed for ever from the sight of God by Christ as the sin bearer. The acceptability of the burnt offering is likewise transferred from the offering to the offerer. The priest who offered carried away the features and characteristics of that offering. All that we are, we owe to Him.

Bringing these thoughts forward to Genesis 3, we see that the coats of skin might speak not only of Christ as substitute (1 Peter 2:24), but also of our acceptance in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6) and our moral suitability to enter the presence of God. Our Lord Jesus lived here in the conscious enjoyment of the Father's love, always acceptable to God, continually showing forth His character (John 14:9). So, the more we take up the holy privilege, for which we have been fitted, of priestly response to Him, where He is, the more we shall take on the features of our Lord while we wait His coming again.

*All that we are, we owe to Him*

# Little Things

## Part 3 A little Lamb (Revelation 5:6-12)

**Douglas Pettman**

*There are few more appealing images than that of a little lamb in springtime. Little wonder, then, that in His word God has kept this particular image to describe His beloved Son. Be moved to worship Him! This is the third in a series on the 'little things' of Scripture. It is based on a talk given on London's Premier Christian Radio.*



### Introduction

Illustration is a powerful language tool. It is not surprising, therefore, to find it used extensively in the Bible. The devil is described as “a roaring lion...seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The Lord Jesus spoke of Herod as ‘that fox’ (Luke 13:32) and in Matthew 7:15, He describes false prophets as those who ‘come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves’.

In this article, we shall look at the lamb. This animal is little when born, but is still a lamb as it grows towards maturity. The Bible uses the lamb as an illustration to bring out characteristics which apply to the Lord Jesus Christ. Those wonderful verses in Revelation 5 describe the early gathering in heaven before the final judgments of the world. There was great sadness that no one was found worthy to act with authority in undertaking to carry through these judgments described in ‘the book’. Then One comes who is able, ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah’ (v.5). As John continues, he writes of One who becomes the centre of worship by all in heaven. Who is this who appears? John does not see the Lion in all His strength, but writes, ‘in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb (or, a little Lamb, see note JND trans.)’. Here is the One who commands all heaven’s attention at that moment – the little Lamb. We might have thought that we should read here of the Son of God, or of Jesus, using His earthly name. John writes of a ‘little Lamb’.

A lamb reminds us of meekness. It is not aggressive; when seen among the flock, it is dependent. It was always available to Israel for sacrifice. In their need, Israel had learned that the only means of covering their sin and of bringing worship to God lay in sacrifice. So John speaks of the lamb to remind us of the great fact that the Lord Jesus became the only sacrifice acceptable to God for the sin of mankind. ‘Little Lamb’ He may be, but His work of salvation is great and mighty! We shall look then at what Scripture has to say about the Lord Jesus as the ‘little Lamb’. Five features are worthy of note.

*Foreordained before the foundation of the world*



### Appointed in the past eternity

“Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:18-20). Peter underlines the thought which runs through Scripture of the lamb as a sacrifice for sin, but applies it particularly to the Lord Jesus. We also learn that God’s plan was made so early on. Moreover, the Lamb of God was totally pure, ‘without blemish and without spot’. The Lord Jesus met every requirement of a holy God against sin.

“[God] hath chosen us in Him *before* the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). Here Paul also confirms what Peter has written. Here was the infinite plan of a Creator God for every believer. It was an amazing plan for the salvation of sinners which existed ‘before the foundation of the world’! So also in Revelation 13:8, the fate of those follow Satan is clear because their “names were not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”. So long ago that plan existed, only for those who accept salvation. That plan was already known to God when the world was first formed.

Do we rely upon a work of salvation which was hastily arranged after the fall of man in the garden of Eden? Never! God knew, before ever man was created, that he would fall and a Saviour would be necessary. That Saviour could not come from men as “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23). So the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb without blemish, was appointed before time began. Oh, the love of God to have such a plan in place!



### Applied in history

Illustrations are many and it is possible to refer only to a few. We learn that there is satisfaction for God. Genesis 3:15 tells us that the woman’s seed will bruise the serpent’s head. The work of the cross wonderfully satisfies God Himself. At the same time, Satan is dealt the severest blow.

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins and clothed them” (Genesis 3:15). It was God’s own provision that covered the sin of Adam. Here is the first indication of sacrifice in Scripture. An animal must have died at God’s hand to provide a covering. A sacrifice for man’s sin was required.

Then in Genesis 22, we read of the lovely incident where God tests Abraham. Abraham is questioned by his son, Isaac, about the missing lamb for sacrifice. He replies, “My son, *God will provide Himself* a lamb for a burnt offering” (v.8). In this first Bible reference to a lamb, we learn that God provides Himself. How amazing is the extent of God’s provision! But this incident brings out a further lesson. Abraham’s offering of his son was not allowed by God. God substituted His own offering for Abraham to sacrifice. We could not bring our own offering to satisfy God nor by our death is our punishment cleared. God needed to substitute His Son, the Lamb, to meet our need.

We will consider just one more illustration from history. In Exodus 12, we have the clearest detail so far of the need for a sacrifice and the quality of the offering required by God. Here we see the great method by which Israel was to be released from slavery in

Egypt and brought into the land God had promised to them. All this could be achieved only by the sacrifice of a lamb! Note some of the important lessons:

V.3. They were to take ‘every man a lamb’. The sacrifice was readily available. No one who desired to be covered by the blood would go without.

V.3. The sacrifice was to meet the need of each individual. There was not one national offering. The man in each household had his own lamb.

V.4. The sacrifice was sufficient for all. ‘If the household be too little for the lamb’ – there would never be a case where the household would be too great!

V.5. The lamb had to be ‘without blemish, a male of the first year’. Nothing other than a perfect lamb would satisfy God. It would have had little time to be caught by the thorns and traps of the world into which it had been born and so be scarred.

V.6. ‘The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it.’ Every one who desired to be covered must act, must put his trust in that sacrifice, if judgment was to pass. Here was a sacrifice which totally satisfied the needs of all.

How apt are these illustrations when God introduces His Lamb to us in Scripture! The Lamb of God fully satisfies God. He meets our individual need and only He is sufficient for this. Only He could be sufficiently pure. If we would avoid the judgment of God against sinners, our only course is to accept His work as being sufficient.



### Announced in due time

We have now reached the point in the Bible where we are to learn of the Person whom the Lamb represents. In due time, this Lamb is announced to the world through John the Baptist. The whole purpose of John’s coming was to bear witness to the Lord Jesus (John 1:7). So we read, “John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (v.29). John was totally convinced, through the Holy Spirit, as to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. He ascribes this title, ‘Lamb of God’, because He would be the ultimate sacrifice for the sin of the world. Jesus alone could deal with the consequences of sin and, in so doing, would suffer the punishment for your sin and mine. To John, and to us, this was a tremendous work! Here is God’s announcement through John that the Lord Jesus is the Lamb of God.

“The next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!” There was something far greater to John than the work of the Lord Jesus; it was the vision and understanding of His Person. John gazed at Him, thrilled with the thought that here was the Son of God in Person, who was to become the Lamb. Does the thought of this divine Person thrill you today?

*Look at Him today; praise Him again and again*

All the types, or pictures, of the lamb in the Old Testament, at which we have been looking, are now revealed in this wonderful Person who came into the world to bear away our sin. Look at Him today; praise Him again and again. The day is coming when this praise will no longer be just in faith, but face to face!



### Abandoned by man and by God

Here, of course, we come to the cross. But the Bible gives us further glimpses of this Lamb. “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). The Lord Jesus was that Lamb – not a word in His own defence, not a word of condemnation of others. He opened not His mouth! How clearly we can see His ready acceptance, in meekness, of the work He was going to do when He went to the cross.

Those who gathered at His mock trial abandoned Him. “And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this Man” (Luke 23:18). Not one would take up His cause. His disciples, too, were utterly scared at the events taking place. What could they do? Peter’s feeble effort in striking the servant of the high priest was all wrong. So we read, “They all forsook Him, and fled” (Mark 14:50). Even His disciples abandoned Him!

Then we read of the work of the soldiers: “They crucified Him” (John 19:18). Apart from two rebels, murderers crucified with Him, no one stood with Him. This was the hour of the sacrifice of the Lamb. As the hymn writer puts it, “Alone He bore the cross, alone its grief sustained”.

Last of all, but most solemnly of all, God forsook Him! On the cross, the Lord Jesus cried out with a loud voice, in utter loneliness, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Never before had that communion been broken! What a terrible scene was then taking place on the cross! When God ‘made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin’ (2 Corinthians 5:21), the holiness of God demanded that the Lord Jesus be totally abandoned as He endured our punishment so that the work of salvation would be complete. The Lamb of God was being sacrificed. That great work, planned before the foundation of the world, was taking place there at Calvary and He was totally alone. “[He] became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). He abandoned Himself for you and me. What a Saviour!



### Acclaimed for ever

No illustration can adequately display this. The first great fact is that ‘God...raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory’ (1 Peter 1:21). All the authority of God was exercised in raising Him that third day and what glory has been His ever since! Peter tells us that the whole point of this was ‘that your faith and hope might be in God’. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus proves that “God is satisfied with Jesus”. Can we go on with the hymn writer to say, “We are satisfied as well”? Stephen, the first Christian martyr, had a glimpse of this glory in the heavens as he was being stoned to death. He called out, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). Yes, He is there! “The highest place

that heaven affords is His by sovereign right.” The One who was sacrificed for sin now enjoys total exaltation!

Let us now return to the point from which we started: “I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a [little] Lamb as it had been slain” (Revelation 5:6). What took the writer’s attention? Not the strength of ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah’ but the wonderful sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus as ‘a little Lamb’. A better translation of ‘as it had been slain’ would be ‘freshly slain’. All the freshness of the work of Christ as the slain Lamb impressed itself on the whole of that heavenly congregation. As raptured saints, when we first come face to face with the Lord Jesus in heaven, we will realise, as we have never done before, all the worth of His sacrifice at Calvary, the sacrifice of the Lamb for our sins. What a commencement of all eternity that will be!

Little wonder, then, that the following verses bring to our attention the full sense of the praise being offered. This is continued through the following verses. So in v.12, we read that the angels join in with all present “saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing”. All those things which were denied Him as a Man in this world are accorded to Him in that day to come! What a crescendo of praise arises to the Lamb that was slain! His sacrificial work becomes the central theme of all heaven. We read in the next verse that ‘every creature’ joins in that tremendous act of worship. Every voice will be in tune; the song to the Lamb that was slain will be loud and clear!

In Revelation 19:7, it seems as if a great multitude is speaking: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready”. Who is this bride, the Lamb’s wife? She is made up of all those who, since the sacrifice of the Lamb on the cross, have trusted Him as their Saviour. He delights to bring each one, who has personally come into the blessing of salvation, into the closest possible relationship, that of wife. What does this imply? His sacrifice brings us to this glorious point of complete oneness with Him. What closeness, what harmony, what adoration of the Lamb then!

*Complete oneness  
with Him*



Finally, in the last chapter of the Bible, eternity is described. We learn that there “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it” (v.3). The Lamb, the Son of God and His sacrificial work, will be paramount in eternity. Does this subject fill and thrill your heart now as you look forward to that coming time? We can offer no greater praise than to worship the Lamb that was slain. Let us look up, for the moment is coming when the Lord Himself will come and we shall be with Him for evermore. Let us praise Him continually for His sacrificial work as the little Lamb!

# The Gospel In Job Part 4

**Yannick Ford**

*The failure of Job's friends to understand his circumstances provides valuable lessons in how not to help people. Job's steadfast confidence in God, in spite of Job's failure to understand his circumstances, is still an inspiration.*

## Zophar's first speech (ch. 11)

Zophar now takes up his argument against Job. As with Eliphaz and Bildad, *some true things are said*, but not necessarily *rightly applied*. Zophar begins by remonstrating with Job for his "multitude of words", and picks on Job's proclaimed self-righteousness: "For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in Thine eyes" (v.4). "I wish God would speak to you directly", is the thrust of Zophar's argument, "and then you would see how much of your evil He has overlooked, and how little you really know about Him!" (vv.5,6).

This is, in fact, what God does, as we will see later, when God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. It is only when God Himself speaks to us, through His word, that our consciences are touched and we see ourselves as we really are before Him.

Confronted by His holiness, we realise what sinners we are, but His love sustains us as we realise, too, that God desires to justify us. He does this through the work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (see Romans 3:23-26).

Zophar was right in saying that the secrets of God's wisdom are "double to that which is" (v.6). In whatever field of study, whether it be deeper investigations into the natural world, or deeper study of God's word, how often we see further and further instances of God's great wisdom! "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honour of kings is to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). Zophar felt that this meant that one could not find out God.

Certainly, as creatures, we can never fully comprehend God (v.7). Zophar asks: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" (vv.7,8; N.B. 'Hell' should properly be translated 'sheol', the place of departed spirits. It is sometimes translated 'grave' in A.V.). In the New Testament, we have the wonderful answer to these questions: "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee,

*See ourselves as we really are before Him*

even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 10:6-11).

It is true that we can never fully understand everything about God, so that figuratively such knowledge would be high as the heavens and deep as the grave. Yet we do not need to ascend to such heights or to descend to such depths in order to understand what we need to know about God. Such knowledge is not far away; it is not just for the learned. It is near us, and involves confessing the Lord Jesus Christ and believing in Him as a risen, living Saviour.

Zophar did not understand these things but, instead, recommends that Job turn from his supposedly evil ways so as to find favour with God (vv.13-15). It is a very common thought and evidently not a new one, that we can gain God’s favour by doing good. There is a certain amount of truth in this *as far as this life is concerned*. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). But we cannot gain God’s favour simply by good deeds. We may be pretty good people when comparing ourselves to others, but none of us reach God’s standards. Furthermore, no one has ever been fully righteous before God, so there is always the matter of past sins. “For all

have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The Bible does not, therefore, consider “doing good” as the opposite of evil so far as how to be right with God is concerned, contrary to what many believe. Rather, “doing evil” is contrasted with “doing truth”: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that *doeth evil* hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that *doeth truth* cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:19-21).

It is only in the full light that we can properly see things as they are. In the full light of God’s holiness, as shown to us by the life of Christ, we see our supposedly good deeds, and the motives behind them, as they really are. There are many who would prefer not to be subjected to this scrutiny, but rather to remain with the good opinion that they and others have of themselves. They are like those in the passage above who hate the light. But if we “do truth”, i.e. by admitting what we really are in the sight of God, we will



be justified, because God has provided forgiveness and justification for sinners.

### Job's reply (chs.12-14)

We can see Job's exasperation with his friends: "No doubt but that ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" (12:2-3). "It seems to me that you think you are the only wise people on the earth," Job is saying, "but I know at least as much as you!"

It is never a good thing to pretend that we have all the answers when we are trying to help someone. None of us can fully appreciate the complexities of every situation, since our own experience and knowledge will necessarily be limited. We are far more likely to be listened to if we admit that we cannot explain everything but we can, instead, point to One who has the answers. Jesus Christ is our wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30), and it is to Him we can turn in every situation. We have a picture of the wisdom of Christ in the Old Testament, when the Queen of Sheba went to see King Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-3).

By their lectures, Job's friends only succeeded further to entrench Job in his own opinions. Job justifies himself again in v.4, and blames his friends for despising him while they were at ease in their comfortable circumstances (v.5). In vv.7-25, Job then describes God's

sovereign power: power over the natural world, power over wise men and nobles, and power over nations. He implies, once again, that God uses His power in a seemingly arbitrary manner, such that the wicked may well be in easy circumstances (v.6).

In ch.13, Job again sharply criticises his friends. He calls them "forgers of lies" (v.4), presumably because they have accused Job of being wicked, while he felt that he was just. He also refers to them as "physicians of no value" and wishes that they would keep silent rather than speak in the way that they had been doing (vv.4,5).

Job's friends' intentions were, no doubt, kind when they decided to come and comfort him (2:11-13) but, as we have seen, their analysis of the situation did little to help Job. Instead, it brought out Job's bitterness and led to both sides exchanging harsh words. Sometimes it is wise to heed the advice of Proverbs 17:28: "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding"!

Vv. 13-16 are very interesting: "Hold your peace, let me alone, that I may speak, and let come on me what will. Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in mine hand? Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: but I will maintain mine own ways before Him. He also shall be my

*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*

salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before Him.” There is a great contrast here which gives us an insight into Job’s faith. On the one hand, he gives expression to his bitterness: “Let me alone that I may speak, and let come on me what will,” as much as to say, “I have suffered enough as it is, so I will say what I feel about it before God, and see what happens!” We have seen that Job felt that his sufferings were meted out to him in an arbitrary fashion, and this is the basis of his accusation of God.

But then Job says, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him”. It seems as if Job knows in his heart that God is not, in fact, acting in an arbitrary manner – even if God were to kill him, Job is sure that God is not ultimately against him. The tension between this deep, inner trust in God on the one hand, and his present circumstances that seem to argue against trust in God, must have been extremely difficult for Job to cope with.

Job nevertheless continues to justify himself, “But I will defend mine own ways before Him” (v.15, JND trans.), and in vv.20-22, he desires to plead his cause with God. In v.23 he asks, “How many are mine iniquities and sins? Make me to know my transgressions and my sins.” This is an important question which each one of us needs to ask – “How many are *my* sins?” If we compare ourselves to other people, we might delude ourselves into thinking that we are not so bad, or even that we are pretty

good people, leading moral, upright lives. It is when we compare ourselves to God’s standard that we begin to realise our shortcomings. God has plainly stated, “*All* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

The Lord Jesus was the only Man on earth whose life completely satisfied God. At the beginning of His ministry, when He was baptised, God was able to say of Him, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). At His transfiguration, we read there was “a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (Matthew 17:5). The Lord Jesus is the perfect example who defines God’s standard. He is the only One who could say in truth and without any pride, “I do always those things that please [the Father]” and “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (John 8:29,46). None of us can reach this standard. We are all guilty of sins of commission (things we have done that we should not have done) as well as sins of omission (things we have not done that we should have done). With Job, all of us have to ask, “How many are mine iniquities and my sins?”

In the mercy of God, the situation does not end there. Isaiah 53 speaks prophetically of the forgiveness that the Lord Jesus bought for us when He suffered the penalty of our sins on His cross. “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our

*There is an absolute necessity for new birth*

iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (v.5).

We will almost certainly never know the true number of our sins and iniquities before God, but if we have trusted in the Lord Jesus for His forgiveness, then we can be assured that He did know all of them, and suffered for all of them: past, present and future. Knowing this to be so, we cannot fear, as did Job when he said to God, “Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth” (13:26). Since all our sins have been forgiven, there is nothing left to be written down as a charge against us! “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

As Job continues his speech in ch.14, he asks a number of most important questions. Firstly, although he has been justifying himself, he nevertheless realises that man is not pure before God: “Who can bring a clean [man] out of the unclean? Not one!” (v.4, JND trans.). This is in accord with several other passages in the Bible that teach us that we are, in our very nature, unclean in God’s sight. David acknowledged this in his psalm of confession: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). So Paul writes, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned...For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners...” (Romans 5:12,19).

The Lord Jesus had to explain this same basic truth to Nicodemus, despite his being a prominent scholar of the Jewish religion: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Nicodemus did not understand this, as can be seen from his reply, “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (v.4). Jesus therefore explained the situation again, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (vv.5-7). This is the essential point: *that which is born of the flesh is flesh*. Whether it is refined or otherwise, educated or not, the flesh can not be acceptable to God. Consequently, there is an absolute necessity for new birth.

This is made possible by the forgiveness available through the Lord Jesus, and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. This is not some esoteric teaching, but a simple reality, as the Lord Jesus further explained to Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

Job, however, did not have the clear understanding given us through the New Testament revelation. He wishes that God would leave him alone: “Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with Thee, Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day” (vv.5,6). In other words, since the length of man’s life is determined by God, and man cannot be pure before God (v.4), why cannot God just leave him alone until he dies?

But, as we have seen, God has thoughts of love towards us, and desires that we should take hold of the wonderful future that He wants us to have, and for which the Lord Jesus died on the cross so that we might be brought into relationship with God. To be left alone by God would, indeed, be far worse, for then we would have remained for ever in our sinful, unforgiven state!

It is, indeed, true that the length of our life is determined by God. The Lord Jesus has the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:17,18, JND trans.). This is a comforting thought for those who have accepted His forgiveness and thus know that there is only rest and true happiness beyond the grave. Their lives are in the complete control of a loving God, and even the moment of their death has been determined by Him, and cannot be altered by any other creature. But it is a solemn thing for those who are as yet “in their sins” – it is dreadful to die in that state, apart from Christ (John 8:21-24).

Job seems to have had a vague idea of a future resurrection: “If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come” (v.14). But this thought does not entirely bring him peace: “O that Thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that Thou wouldest keep me secret, until Thy wrath be past, that Thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!” (v.13).

The New Testament tells us plainly what is to come after death: “It is appointed unto men once to die, but *after this the judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27). Death of the body does not mean death of the soul. Furthermore, there will be a resurrection of the body at a future date. The words of the Lord Jesus are important: “Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28,29).

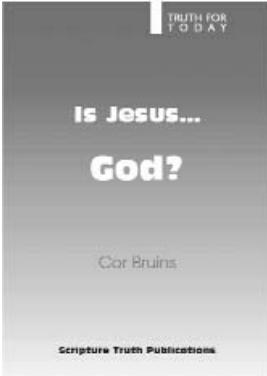
Job’s desire was that he might be hidden, so to speak, after his death, and that his resurrection (“my change”) would occur once God’s anger was past. But God’s anger is *already past* for those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness. Such can say, “There is therefore now *no condemnation* to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). So the Lord Jesus could say, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

*(now read the poem on the back cover)*

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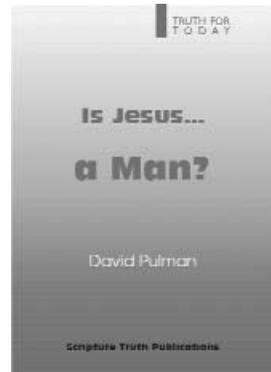
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David Pulman was born in 1945 at Newcastle upon Tyne. After completing his education in that city he work for public utilities, mainly in Information Technology, until taking early retirement from British Gas based at Solihull at the end of 1996. Since then David has devoted his time to serving the Lord in the UK.

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## For Me?!

O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!  
Our load was laid on Thee;  
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead –  
To bear all ill for me.  
A victim led, Thy blood was shed;  
Now there's no load for me.  
Death and the curse were in our cup –  
O Christ, 'twas full for Thee!  
But Thou hast drained the last dark drop,  
'Tis empty now for me.  
That bitter cup – love drank it up;  
Left but the love for me.  
Jehovah lifted up His rod –  
O Christ, it fell on Thee!  
Thou wast forsaken of Thy God;  
No distance now for me.  
Thy blood beneath that rod has flowed:  
Thy bruising healeth me.  
The tempest's awful voice was heard,  
O Christ, it broke on Thee;  
Thine open bosom was my ward;  
It bore the storm for me.  
Thy form was scarred, Thy visage marred;  
Now cloudless peace for me.  
For me, Lord Jesus, Thou hast died,  
And I have died with Thee;  
Thou'rt risen: my bands are all untied;  
And now Thou liv'st in me.  
The Father's face of radiant grace  
Shines now in light on me.

*(Mrs Anne Ross Cousin)*