

Scripture Truth

Scripture Truth
The Father's Love
The God of All Grace
How To Study the Bible
The Sure Purposes of God
A Look at Nehemiah for Today

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The Father's Love

David Anderson

“So dear, so very dear to God, More dear I cannot be; The love wherewith He loves the Son, Such is His love to me.” These words of the hymn writer would encourage us to explore what Scripture has to say about the Father’s love for His Son. This article will repay careful study and meditation.

In John’s Gospel there is a special unfolding of the Father’s Name. The Father’s love is commensurate with His Name. In this article, we will trace the Father’s love as a developing theme throughout the Gospel. Primarily, it is the Father’s love for His Son (1:18; 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9,10), but the Father’s love for those who believe on His Son is also developed (14:21,23; 16:27; 17:23,24,26). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Light, the One who brings the knowledge of the reality of these truths to men.

Love is

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). This verse presents eternity to us and states that there are distinct Persons in the Godhead. It informs us that the Word “was with God”. That is, He was face-to-face with God, in a position of nearness.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth...[which]

...came through Jesus Christ. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (1:14,17,18). V.14 describes the eternal relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. There is a unique glory connected with that relationship: that of an only begotten with a Father. As the Word, the Son brings first-hand knowledge of the Father to us. He is fully competent to express the Father because He came forth from His side.

V.18 describes the affections that are proper to that un-originated, eternal Father/Son relationship. The Son is “in the bosom of the Father”, the eternal place of habitation enjoyed by the Son. The Father’s bosom has been called ‘the hiding place of love’ and describes the divine essence, the true nature of God – love! The word ‘bosom’ conveys thoughts of the closest and most complete union, the tenderest intimacy, and the unbroken essential fellowship of eternal love. In it, there are equal and reciprocal affections of the divine Persons of the Godhead.

*The Son brings first-hand
knowledge of the Father to us*

The quality of eternity, which belongs to this bosom, is the eternal Father's love for His eternal Son.

As the Word, the Son is not only capable of making God known; He is also fully qualified to tell of the Father's love, because He abides in His bosom. The Son continues, or 'abides', in the Father's love because He always keeps His commandments (15:10). As the hymn writer expresses it, He "dwells in His bosom; knoweth all that in that bosom lies; and came to earth to make it known". The Son of the Father's love is competent to declare the Father's Name, the Name of love. He alone tells the complete story: "I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them and I in them" (17:26).

But v.18 tells us that it is God who is fully revealed. All the Persons of the Godhead, including the Holy Spirit, are made known by the Son. Let us notice, in passing, that the Holy Spirit is vital to the intimacy and blessedness of the Father's bosom, because He eternally proceeds from the Father (15:26). He is the living water of eternal life.

Five times in the New Testament the Son is described as "the only begotten Son" (John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9). Its meaning can be found from Hebrews 11:17, which quotes the Septuagint version of Genesis 22:2, where God "said [to Abraham], "Take now your son, your only begotten son Isaac, whom you love"". Jesus is God's unique and only Son, "the One and Only" (NIV). He is His darling. The name "only begotten"

describes His relationship to God eternally!

The "who is" in v.18 is literally "the One being". This Name is used in the Septuagint version of Exodus 3:14: "God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM". And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'"". The 'One who is' (expressed in the present continuous tense) therefore relates to the idea of the 'always existing One'. In the same sense, the bosom of the Father is the place where the Son 'always exists (eternally lives)'.
In John 1:39, Jesus invites John's disciples, and us, to "Come and see" where He dwells!

**"Lord, we do not ask the question,
Where abidest Thou?
Well we know where Thou art dwelling,
Well we know it now.
Thou abidest in the bosom
Of the Father's love;
In that love for ever living,
Love all thought above."**

The Father is always present with the Son; He never leaves Him alone (8:16,29; 16:32). It is impossible to separate Father and Son. There cannot be any interruption to this eternal relationship. Even about Calvary we can say "the two of them went together" (Genesis 22:6,8) to the place of sacrifice!

In other parts of John's Gospel, the Father is said to be in the Son and the Son in the Father (10:38; 14:10,11,20). If life is conscious existence, then the Son is always conscious of living in, and with, His Father and of enjoying His love. This is eternal life (1 John 1:2) and adequately



sums up this section. We conclude that divine love is the very atmosphere of eternity: “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).

Love gives

“The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hands” (3:35).

Vv.31-36 are John's own commentary on John the Baptist's insistence on the pre-eminence of Christ recorded in vv.27-30. John states that Christ is from heaven and speaks the very words of God – the heavenly things promised in v.12! V.35 stands unique in these verses. It is a statement of eternal truth that the Father's love centres on the Son. These words are in the present continuous tense and are therefore true of eternity (past, present or future). But the Father's love for His Son is demonstrated by the fact that He has given everything into His hands. The Son is the Heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2).

He has been given the authority to dispose of everything as He sees fit to do so. From other parts of Scripture, we learn that “all things” include the whole work of God: creation, theophanies, redemption, judgment. We see from v.36 that it even includes the destiny of men!

John accurately assesses the overall effect of the Gospel. Being acutely aware of men's rejection of the Son's testimony (v.32), John writes of the Father's appreciation of His Son from all eternity (vv.34,35). (John heard these words directly from the lips of his Lord (5:20)). He contrasts “no-one accepts His testimony” with “the One... [who]...speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit [to Him]” (3:32,34). This rejection shows that man's love is misplaced: “[they] loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (3:19). But the Gospel declares that God's love for men is causeless. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (3:16). God has given His best, His one and only Son. The condemnation of any who reject such a gift is just: “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” (3:18).

*God has given His best,
His one and only Son*

Later in this Gospel, out of all the things given to Him by His Father, the Lord identifies all believers as the Father's special gift to the Son. So important is this giving of believers to the Son by the Father that John mentions the fact three times (6:37,39; 10:15,29; 17:6).

Finally, we must not overlook the important meaning of the "all things" of 3:35 intended in the following verses:

"Jesus, knowing that *the Father had given all things into His hands...*took a towel and girded Himself" (13:1-5).

"Jesus therefore, *knowing all things that would come upon Him*, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" (18:4,8,9).

"After this, Jesus, *knowing that all things were now accomplished*, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" (19:28-30).

Love trusts

"Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel" (5:19,20).

The sign enacted at the pool of Bethesda, when Jesus made the lame man to walk on the Sabbath, gave rise to an extraordinary discourse with the Jews. In this, the first recorded words of the Son Himself about the Father's love, He insists that the Son cannot act independently of the Father, i.e. by Himself. Furthermore, there is absolute unity and communion

within the Godhead (v.19). It is the Father who is the Originator, the Source, and who instigates the work. In the workings of God, it is the Son who carries out whatever He sees/hears the Father do. His works are the Father's works (v.36). (Likewise, whatever the Spirit hears, He speaks (16:13)). But the Son can, and does do, the works of the Father. Nothing is kept secret from the Son. The Father has full confidence in the Son, because He loves the Son (v.20). There is full cooperation and coincidence between them (v.17). In the full warmth of His Father's love, the Son acts with, and for, the Father in the vital issues of resurrection, giving life (including spiritual life), and judgment (vv.21,22).

The equalities within the Godhead occupy much of the discourse (vv.19-27). The Lord Jesus emphatically states that the Father always treats Him as His equal. There are several important points in these verses concerning the essential oneness, in nature and being, of God the Father and God the Son.

1. Jesus had already said in v.17 that the Father and the Son work together in absolute unity. The Son's works are, therefore, His Father's works.
2. In answer to the renewed hostility of the Jews (v.18), Jesus states that He, the Son, *never* acts of His own volition. He is always directed by His Father. The Father and He *always* act together (v.19).
3. This joint action occurs because there is equality in knowledge within the Godhead (v.20).
4. Even in resurrection of the dead, and in the giving of life to people, the

Son acts with the Father. There is equivalence of ability between the Father and the Son (v.21).

5. The Father is fully capable of judging, but He has committed all judgment to the Son. The Son acts as the Judge of all on behalf of the Father (v.22).
6. God's demand, therefore, is that the status of the Son is acknowledged by all. Any honour and dignity given to the Father are also due to the Son (v.23).
7. Spiritual life is imparted equally by the Father and the Son (vv.24,25).
8. There is equality in their self-existence: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" (v.26).
9. The judgment and authority of the Son is exactly the same as that of the Father (v.27).

Love obeys

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (10:14-18).

Although the Father has always had a satisfying object for His love in the Son, there is an additional fresh cause, a new motive for loving Him, stated here in ch.10. Calvary is the occasion for its outflow! There the Son laid down His life, not only as the Good Shepherd for His sheep (vv.11,15), but also in obedience to His Father's will. He knew it would please Him (v.17). This was responsive

love to His Father's commandment (vv.17,18). In the perfect unity of divine Persons, there is always the perfect obedience that love produces.

Again, there is much hostility to the Lord Jesus from the Jews. What Jesus said divided opinion (vv.19-21) to such a degree that they surrounded Him and demanded a straight answer to their question: "Was He the Christ?" (v.24). The Father had already provided the answer for He had singled out the Son, the Sanctified One, and had sent Him into the world to do His works (vv.36-38). In a rebellious world, the Son would demonstrate His obedience: "But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do" (14:31). As the uniquely obedient Man, He continued to live in the way that He knew from eternity – He always lived in the Father's love and obeyed Him!

We experience the love of the Son in a practical way when we live in His love and obey Him: "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (15:9,10). The outcome is: "...that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (15:11). Similarly, when we practically obey the Son, we are also loved by the Father: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father...If any one loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him" (14:21,23). But the Father also unconditionally loves those

who believe that He sent the Son: “For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God” (16:27,28).

Love desires

“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (17:5).

The Son requests to be glorified as a Man with that glory which He had from eternity. It appears from v.4 that the Lord Jesus assumes that this prayer will be granted as a consequence of His having glorified the Father on earth. In ch.17, the Lord's thoughts are very much about eternity. But we have already noticed that for the Son, eternity is the Father's bosom. As His equal, the Son makes His own demands by invoking the Father's love (see vv.20-26).

We have seen that the Father's love for the Son is an eternal love. That love is the very essence of the Father/Son relationship. Here it is described in its eternal nature, which pervades eternity: “You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (v.24). The ‘My glory’ of v.24 is the unique glory which is proper to the only begotten Son who has completed the Father's will. We will behold this glory in the place where it can properly be displayed – the Father's house above! We will see why the Father loves the Son – the glory will express it.

By contrast, this world is nothing, just a passing episode of time before this coming eternity. It does not know, and refuses to get to know, the Father (v.25). But the Father will show such a world that He loves the saints with the same love as He has for the Son (v.23)! Amazingly to us, this is just what the Son desires of the Father! However, in measure, we already experience and know the Father's love. We do not have to wait, as it were, until the coming day of display. As we obey the Son, we are loved by both the Father and the Son (14:21,23). The Lord Jesus promises to continue to declare the Father's Name to His own so that the Father's love may be a present reality in them (v.26).

Love can be measured by what it gives. Believers are the Father's special love-gift to the Son: “the men whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me” (17:6). The words “You gave them to Me” are repeated several times in this prayer of the Son to His Father (vv.2, 6 (twice), 7, 9 and 24). We learn from v.20 that we, too, are included in this unique group of people!

The extent of love's giving will be determined by its appreciation of its object. It is true to say, therefore, that the Father considers believers to be a worthy gift for His Son! The Lord breathes out words of reciprocal appreciation: “those whom

*Believers are the Father's
special love-gift to the Son*

You have given Me...they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them” (vv.9,10). Believers have a special place in the Lord’s heart because they are the Father’s love-gift to Him, as the following scriptures indicate:

“*All that the Father gives Me* will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out...This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of *all He has given Me* I should lose nothing” (6:37-39).

“None of [*those given to Me*] is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (17:12; 18:9).

“I give [My sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. *My Father, who has given them to Me*, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one” (10:28,29).



Love values, treasures and guards the gift it is given from the One it loves. This is why believers are treated as special by the Son Himself. They are brought to know the Giver, and therefore they are given eternal life (17:2). They are shown the Father’s Name and kept in the good of it (vv.6,11,26). They are given the Father’s word(s) (vv.8,14). Not only are they prayed for by the Son (v.9), but He also protects them (v.12). He sends them into the world in the same manner in which He Himself was sent by His Father (v.18). He shares with them His glory that was the outcome of His obedience to the Father’s will (v.22). Finally, in a living way, He continues to declare to them the secrets of the Father’s Name so that they will be continued to be loved by the Father (vv.23,26).

Love responds

“See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God. For this reason the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and what we shall be has not yet been manifested; we know that if it is manifested we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:1-3, JND trans.).

As we meditate upon the Father’s love for His well-beloved Son, and the fact that we have been “brought to rest within the circle where love’s treasures are displayed”, we can surely exclaim with fresh amazement, “What love!” Divine love, nothing less, is the character of the love that has been set upon us!

How To...

Part I How to study the Bible

Cor Bruins

We begin a series of studies on some practical issues that are important to Christians today. Appropriately, we begin with a look at Bible study. To walk in daily communion with the Lord Jesus requires that we learn of Him from His word, the Bible. This article is based on a talk given on London's Premier Christian Radio.

The importance of Bible study

Some sincere Christians disdain the whole idea of the necessity to study the Bible. They would say, "You don't have to study or interpret the Bible; just read it and do what it says. The Bible explains itself." Yet the apostle Paul said to Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Paul is saying that we must study, or give diligence, to handle aright the word of truth. It is from the Bible that we learn and determine if others are teaching the truth (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1).

Sometimes we hear this argument: "Any person with half a brain can read the Bible and understand it". Some believe in special revelation – the Holy Spirit, they claim, reveals truth directly to them, apart from the Bible, or the Spirit provides them with an esoteric meaning of Scripture. Others just randomly open a page in the Bible and read a verse, making their own arbitrary application. Others simply read the Bible, without particularly studying it, their aim being to read it from cover to cover once every two years.

It is important, however, that we realise the need and importance of as thorough and detailed knowledge of the Bible as our time and capacity allows. Bible study involves hard work, because it demands thought. It cannot be accomplished by reading only – Bible reading is not Bible study. It can be much easier to read books about the Bible. This makes far less demand on our time and thought than studying the Bible for ourselves. But Bible study is the most essential and most profitable of our Christian duties.

The aim of Bible study

Bible study is to feed our spiritual lives (1 Peter 2:2). Through it, we get to know the Lord better (Philippians 3:10). It should lead us to worship, otherwise it will be a purely intellectual exercise. It enables us to help others (Acts 18:26; Matthew 13:51,52). We need to see Christ "in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27).

The Lord Jesus Himself provides us with the motivation to study the Bible: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31,32).

*Ye shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you free*

Some requirements for Bible study

Because the Bible is totally different from any other book, certain conditions need to be fulfilled if we are to study it with profit.

We must believe in the total inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. We must take it very seriously – it deals with God and man. To be born again is not sufficient to understand the Scriptures. Jesus' disciples did not immediately understand His words (John 13:36,37; 14:5,8,22; 16:12,17). We need the help and illumination of the Holy Spirit. Even having the Holy Spirit may not be sufficient – we need to be spiritually minded (1 Corinthians 2:15; James 1:21) and to receive the word with meekness. John writes, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding" (1 John 5:20). So we find Christ opening the understanding of the two on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:32,45).

We need the fellowship of other believers. We may find help by reading what God has said to us through the writings of good and holy men, but no believer by self-study, independently, will fully enter into all the truth of God. We need to be taught (Proverbs 3:5; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:8).

We may distinguish and formulate truths without fully grasping them. No one knows the Father but the Son (Matthew 11:27). Our knowledge is imperfect (1 Corinthians 13:9). Sometimes expounding Scripture is difficult because of the limitations of our intellect. We should not be surprised if differences of exposition exist among believers.

We need to recognise the human side of the Bible. The fact that the Bible has a human side, whilst still the word of God, is for our encouragement. It also challenges us as it is the reason why we need to interpret what it says. In speaking through real persons, in a variety of circumstances over a period of some 1,500 years or more, God's word was expressed in the vocabulary and thought patterns of those persons and conditioned by the culture of those times and circumstances. One of the most important aspects of the human side of the Bible is that, in order to communicate His Word to every human condition, God chose to use almost every available kind of communication: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, all kinds of laws, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters and sermons. To interpret properly the "then and there" of biblical terms, we need to know some general rules that apply to all the words of the Bible, and to learn the special rules that apply to each of these literary forms.

It helps to remember that the first 39 books, the Old Testament, tell us that *Christ is coming*. The first four books of the New Testament tell us that *Christ has come*. The last 23 books of the New Testament tell us that *Christ is coming again*.

Basic tools for Bible study

The 66 books of the Bible were originally written in three different languages: Hebrew (most of the Old Testament), Aramaic (similar to Hebrew and used in half the book of Daniel and two passages in Ezra), and Greek (all the New Testament). Three good translations of the Bible are the KJV (King James Version), the NIV (New International Version) and the JND translation. Even without a knowledge of Greek or Hebrew, the following will prove useful: The Interlinear Bible (Hebrew-Greek-English); Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament; Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; W.E.Vine's Expository Dictionary of Bible Words; Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. These will be sufficient to help the student to get to the original meaning of the words of the Bible.

Where do we start?

Genesis 1:1 is our point of departure. To really study the Bible, we ought first to read it right through from Genesis to Revelation – a daunting but worthwhile task! From the creation to the ultimate end the Bible is a record of God's dealings with this world. From Genesis to Revelation, we have the record of all God's dealings with men in the past and (with regards to the last book of the Bible) the future. That is perhaps the reason why many people find the book of Revelation so difficult because this last book of the Bible is full of references to all the other books of the Bible. It assumes, therefore, that we have read all the earlier books.

Every day we must eat a little of the living bread of God's word. The best time to do this is the early morning but, if that is not possible, any other regular time is useful. Read short passages of not too difficult content. Look out for warnings, exhortation, encouragement, and promises. Pray and give thanks, not only with regard to all that happens in your life, but also for what you read in God's word. In this way, you cultivate a reverent dialogue with God the Father and with the Lord Jesus as the Holy Spirit continues to lead you.

Believing in the total inspiration of Scripture should leave no room for our prejudices. Often the Bible explains itself by giving us the key to unlock other scriptures (2 Peter 1:20); no one verse of the Bible should be read independently of the rest of the Bible. We should beware of building on first impressions. We need to accept the unity of the 66 books of the Bible. No word or comma is without significance (Matthew 5:18). Finally, we must let the Word judge us, not we the Word.

*A reverent dialogue with God the Father
and with the Lord Jesus*

Remember the scope of principles

The Bible has natural divisions. We all accept that it is divided into two great divisions: the Old Testament and the New Testament. We must learn and catalogue these divisions and natural sections. It is true that the whole Bible is *for* us, but the whole Bible is not *about* us. It has been well said, “Distinguish the dispensations and you will understand the Scriptures”.

We must constantly ask the following questions as we read Scripture: Is this for all time? Is this for a certain time only? Are we still bound by this?

Some fundamental principles of Bible study

It is good to cultivate the habit of always asking the following questions:

“Who is speaking?” Everything in the Bible was written by men who were inspired by God. However, these inspired writers necessarily at times recorded the words of evil men. Even words of Satan are recorded (Job 1:9; 2:4; Matthew 4:3). These words are accurately recorded, but they are not recommended for us to follow today. Asking the question, “Who is speaking?”, will show us whether they are words we should obey.

“Who is spoken to?” In Genesis 6:14, we have the following commandment of God: “Make yourself an ark of gopher wood”. Is it necessary for us today to build a ship out of gopher wood to please God? No! This was a command given only to Noah!

“When is the Bible writer speaking?” Is the writer speaking to people such as Abraham and Isaac who lived in the patriarchal age when God revealed His will directly to the fathers? Or is he speaking to the people of Israel who lived under the Law which God gave Moses at Mount Sinai? Or is he speaking to people today who live under the Law of Christ, which is the New Testament?

What type of language is the inspired writer using? All human languages use two types of speech: literal and figurative. Literal language is the type found in the historical books of the Bible such as Genesis and Exodus, the book of Acts, etc. It is fact. Literal words must be understood to have their actual meaning. If a sheep is mentioned, it means a four-legged animal which has wool on its back. Figurative language is different. Words are used to represent ideas or thoughts which are different from the actual meaning of the word. A sheep or a lamb may be spoken of, but an animal is not meant. Jesus, the Son of God, was a man in this world. But in figurative language in the Bible, He is sometimes spoken of as a lamb (John 1:29; Revelation 5:6). We need to see whether the passage is to be taken literally, symbolically, figuratively or allegorically.

“What are the conditions or circumstances in which this was written?” Ask yourself continually in which time period each passage should be placed. What are the particular circumstances? Did it come to pass? Does it still have a further fulfilment? What was the reason for it being written? What is its aim?

We need to be able to recognise the appropriate method for the study of a particular passage: the historical method; the practical method; the typological/prophetical method.

The historical method. What does the text say in the original language? What do the words in the original mean? How does it interrelate with other passages? What about the grammar, construction, geography, style?

The practical method. What is the spiritual/moral significance and its practical application? Remember that there is both ‘exposition’ and ‘application’.

The typological/prophetical method. Is this prophecy already fulfilled? Or not yet? How and when will the fulfilment take place?

A look at some Bible books

In studying a particular Bible book, it is helpful to look for key words and key verses. Some examples are given below.

Romans chs.1-8

1:1-5:11 is about the subject of *sins*.

5:12-8:39 is about the subject of *sin*.

Psalms

It is helpful to recognise the five divisions of this book. These divisions can be readily recognised by the fact that the first four divisions end with the same refrain: 41:13; 72:18-20; 89:52; 106:48.

The book of the Revelation

1:19 gives us the divisions of this book as follows:

Ch.1 “What you have seen.”

Chs.2,3 “What is now.”

Chs. 4-22 “What shall be hereafter.”

The book of the Acts

1:8 gives us an outline of the book. The overall theme is “Ye shall be witnesses”.

Chs.1-7 In Jerusalem

Chs.8-12 In all Judea, and in Samaria

Chs.13-28 Unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we should remember that the Bible is God’s Book. It is His revelation to mankind. But in order to understand it, we must learn to study it properly. We must “rightly divide the word of truth”.

Rightly divide the word of truth

A Look At Nehemiah For Today

Part 9 Renewal (8:1-12)

Ted Murray

This important chapter in the book of Nehemiah focuses attention on the centrality of the Word of God as the basis for life, both individually and nationally. We very much need to get back to that centrality today.

The Feast of Trumpets

Jerusalem was now secure; the inhabitants were fully accounted for. The people were all in their respective cities (7:73). Chapter 8 opens with a general sense of security. But there was still another issue to be met. It was the seventh month, the month of the three feasts of the LORD (see Leviticus 23). On this, the first day of the month (v.2), the Feast of Trumpets was to be held. This feast was instituted to remind the Israelites that throughout their wilderness journey, it was God who had directed their way. He had instructed Moses to make two silver trumpets (see Numbers 10:2). The blast of one trumpet was to

summon the leaders; the sound of both trumpets was the signal for the people to begin their journey. During the Feast of Trumpets, the people would reflect upon all the way in which God had led them.

As we look for a lesson for us today, it might be suggested that the sound of one trumpet has already taken place. Israel is back in the Land, albeit in unbelief; the leaders have been assembled. As Christians, we await the sound of the trump of God, summoning us to meet the Lord in the air (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16). In the meanwhile, it is good for us, too, to have a time of reflection and remind ourselves of what God has done for us during our lives. As the hymn

writer reminds us, “Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done”. Such reflection should surely cause a note of praise to rise from our hearts.

This chapter, and Ezra 3, open with the same words: “...the people gathered themselves together as one



The word of God stands unchanged

man...” It is good when people have a sense of well-being, are happy with their lot and are aware of their obligations to the Lord. But we need to beware of any sense of self-satisfaction! One thing was missing here, and the chapter begins by identifying what it was. There was the need for the people to be aware of God’s requirements so that they might walk in obedience to His will. So the book of the law of Moses is brought out; the people go back to basics.

Awakening to God’s Word

Today, we, too, need to be governed by the word of God. Throughout the Church’s history, all awakenings and revivals have been brought about by the revealed word of God, the Bible. In Old Testament times, Josiah was given the book of the law found in the temple (2 Chronicles 34). Hezekiah also had an awakening based on the revealed word of God (2 Chronicles 30). John Wycliffe (1320-1384) was a forerunner of the 16th century Reformation when men like Martin Luther (1483-1546), William Tyndale (1490-1536) and John Calvin (1509-1564) were awakened to re-introduce truths that had been lost in the Dark Ages. All these men sought to bring the people back to the word of God. In the 19th century, God used men like J.N.Darby and his associates to revive truths of God that were no longer being presented to the Church.

These men searched the Scriptures, seeking the truth that was contained in them, in order to live according to it. Sadly, in the Church today, the truths that those men found and lived by are no longer treasured and, in some cases, are even being rejected and put to one side. Just as failure marked the Jews in the days of Josiah and Hezekiah, so it has marked all the revivals during the Church’s history. However, the resources that were available to the men of history are available to us in our day. The word of God stands unchanged. It is unerring, abiding and readily available to all in many parts of the world.

As we look into the chapter, a number of salient points catch our attention. The first is that, in gathering in Jerusalem, the people had responded to the call of the trumpet. It is only those who have first responded to the call of the Gospel who are able then to respond to the truths contained in Scripture. The people gathered, as one man, in the open square that was before the Water Gate (v.3), the place which reminds us of the refreshing, cleansing and reviving abilities of the word of God (Ephesians 5:26). The people were all of one mind. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1). Having arrived at Jerusalem, the people could now experience the joy of fellowship with one another.

The people gathered themselves together as one man

Bring the Book

It must have been a wonderful sight for Nehemiah as he looked out of his house to see the crowds of people. What a thrill as he saw that the city was now secure and the safety of the people was established! The walls with their gates were functioning properly; the gatekeepers were in position and all seemed well. There must have been a sense of thankfulness to God for the way in which He had been their help over the past months during the rebuilding of the walls. What the visiting people thought we are not told but they were like minded.

We can identify with this feeling today. How good it is to gather together with the Lord's people. Such occasions ought to be times of real joy. How sad it is when meetings for fellowship are arranged but some do not take advantage of the opportunity to meet with fellow believers! The people in Nehemiah's day gathered together with real joy and with a great desire to know more about the things of God as revealed in His word. Ezra was told to bring the book of the law of Moses (v.1). What a cry went from their lips: "Bring the Book!"

Is this Book, the Bible, our first call, or do we just read what others have written on it to obtain our teaching? The people might have had a testimony meeting, as it were. They might have listened to Nehemiah giving an account of the rebuilding of the walls, or to Haggai

relating how he and Zechariah had encouraged the people to complete the rebuilding of the Temple, or to Zerubbabel's account of the re-introduction of Temple worship. No doubt they would have been encouraged by all this. But no! The cry goes up, "Bring the Book!" The people wanted to know for themselves what the word of God had to teach them in their day.

It should be the same for us today. Let our desire be to know what God wants to teach us. We have God's written word, the Bible, and the illumination of God's Holy Spirit, the One whom the Lord Jesus promised would "guide [us] into all truth" (John 16:13). What others have written on the word of God can be helpful and we should not ignore the gifts God has given to His church in this way. But we need to beware of giving them more credence than Scripture itself. The need to go back to the Book is as great today as it has ever been!

Praise to God

Having brought the book, Ezra reads from it (v.3). This is the first time in this book of Nehemiah that Ezra is mentioned. Scripture records its own testimony to this faithful servant of God: "This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses...Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:6,10). Ezra might be described as 'a

platform man', a man able to fill the pulpit. Often in the past, and sadly also in our day, the pulpit has been occupied by men who are not fully equipped to do so. Ezra was a man who not only knew the book, he had experienced the "good hand of his God upon him" (Ezra 7:9) in his journey up from Babylon and had expressed his thanks for it.

Now in v.6 of our chapter, Ezra blesses "the LORD, the great God". What a moment this was! The people were affected by Ezra's thanksgiving and echoed their 'Amen's, worshipping the Lord with due reverence. How encouraging it is to hear all the Christian company join in saying 'Amen' when prayer and thanksgiving is offered! This can be particularly encouraging to those who may be somewhat hesitant in taking part publicly.

Teaching God's Word

Ezra had become aware of a problem – the people who gathered that day in the square in front of the Water Gate were a people to whom the Hebrew spoken language was almost foreign. During, and after, the captivity, Aramaic had become the language of everyday use. To overcome the problem, Ezra summoned more helpers. There were thirteen of them (v.7), besides those who occupied the steps of the pulpit (v.4). Between them, "they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (v.8). What a responsibility those men had! But the responsibility today is no less for those who occupy the platform to minister God's word! How important it is to read the word of God distinctly. How sad it is if listeners have difficulty in follow-

ing the public reading of the Bible. It is sometimes read much too fast, without due care and reverence. The pronunciation of some of the names of places and people show a lack of research. There are numerous aids available for the proper pronunciation of biblical names. It behoves those who occupy the pulpit to have such a publication to hand so that they, too, are able to read distinctly.

Not only did they read distinctly, they gave sense to the reading of the word (v.8). Ezra was well acquainted with the Scriptures and was able to instruct others (see Ezra 7:6). The fact that Ezra was able to have helpers alongside him at the public reading is evidence of his diligence in teaching the word. If there is a lack of teachers today, it is not God's fault. The gifts are still available to the church, through the Spirit. It is our fault if they are not used.

Timothy was instructed to pass on what he had learned from Paul to faithful men who would be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2). We have God's treasury of truth at our disposal. We are responsible not only to display it in our day, but also to ensure that those who follow are fully aware of its value. Those who occupy the pulpit must make sure that their hearers understand what is being said. We now live in the 21st century, an age of rapid communication. We need to become acquainted with, and be able to use these methods to pass on our spiritual heritage.

Living and powerful

In v.9, we see the amazing power of the word of God: "All the people wept when

they heard the words of the law”. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”. V.9 is a demonstration of this living, powerful word of God. Further consideration of v.9 brings before us yet another aspect of the word of God. Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites use it to bring comfort and refreshment to the people.

The people gathered at the Water Gate had had a severe shock as they listened to the reading of the book of the law. Their consciences had had a rude awakening; they deeply felt their guilt, and that of their fathers, in refusing to obey the word of God and were grief stricken. It is only when man is at the end of his tether that God can move in to help. What words of comfort are expressed by those in the pulpit: “This day is holy unto the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep”. What a day! We, too, can look back to a day, or time, in our lives when we believed the word of God that “Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). That was a day holy to the Lord, our second birthday and a happy day for us!

The joy of the Lord

What an exhortation now proceeds from Nehemiah, culminating with those wonderful words, “The joy of the LORD is

your strength” (v.10). The people were told to appreciate what they had and to share it with others. In Jerusalem at that time there were some people who had nothing. They, too, were to be brought into this same joy.

In this affluent, material age, there still exists a great spiritual need. A few years ago, there was a song in the ‘Hit Parade’ entitled “There is no satisfaction”. Little did the song-writer realise just how true those words are for, without Christ, there is no lasting joy. As a hymn writer has put it,

I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But oh, the waters failed!
E’en as I stooped to drink they fled
And mocked me as I wailed.

Thank God there is an answer and the same writer knew it. So the chorus reads,

Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me;
There’s love, and life, and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus, found in Thee.

Let us in our day rejoice in the God of our salvation, becoming more acquainted with His word and so appreciating its contents in a much deeper way. This will lead us to enjoy the extent of the blessing into which we have been brought. In this way, we will be moved to bless the Lord our God and to share the blessing with those who have nothing.

The joy of the LORD is your strength

The God of All Grace

Part 2 The God of peace

Douglas Pettman

“The God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). In today’s trouble torn world, how much we need to lay hold of this precious promise. Learn how this promise can work out in practice in our lives. This article is based on a talk given on London’s Premier Christian Radio.

When I was a boy, one of the games we played involved two teams with one team set to search for the other. If a player needed to leave the game, he would cross his fingers, hold up his hands and cry ‘pax’. Since that time, I have learned that this is the Latin word for our English word ‘peace’. It means ‘a cessation of hostilities’. How clear this becomes when we have been at war and peace is declared! Hostilities cease. There are both victors and vanquished.



The word translated ‘peace’ in our English Bible comes from the Hebrew ‘shalom’ and the corresponding Greek ‘eirene’. The basis of the word is different. It is less concerned with a cessation of hostilities but brings out the sense of the harmonious relationships enjoyed between men and women and, particularly, between man and God. What a difference this makes! In our relationship

with God, we are concerned, not just with a cessation of the hostility which has ever existed between us, always on our part, but with the much more positive and active state of enjoying a harmonious relationship with God.

Sometimes we want to get away from the busyness of daily living for a break, for a place of quietness and rest, which we regard as peaceful. The full meaning of the biblical word is much more than this. It emphasises activity, where every part exists together in harmony and working together. If you stand a coin on its edge on top of a generator and start the motor, that coin is very likely to fall off. However, if you stand that same coin on the bonnet of a Rolls Royce, the coin will remain standing when the engine starts; the whole engine is smoothly and actively running together and there is no jarring to spoil the harmony.

The Bible speaks quite clearly of peace as active harmony, the relationship which should exist between man and God. There can be neither peace nor harmony between

He is our peace

man and God apart from what God has done. This is not a peace that we can make; there is behind it a God whose power can make it a reality to each one. Thus our remarkable position is that we can now know the God of peace in a very close relationship.

Peace with God

This is the first essential in knowing the God of peace. In the early chapters of his letter to the Romans, Paul shows how impossible it is for man, by his own efforts, to come to know God. “There is none righteous, no, not one...there is none that seeketh after God...all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10,11,23). That is our position before God. So Isaiah tells us, “There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked” (48:22).

The Lord Jesus alone has made peace between us and a righteous God, and we have peace only by Him. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace...he...came and preached peace to you” (Ephesians 2:13,14,17). Let us never get away from this tremendous blessing that, through the work of the cross, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1)!

Life sometimes seems very frustrating and difficult. How can we face the problems that will arise today which leave us stressed and depressed? The great comfort to our souls is to enjoy this peace with God! The Lord Jesus, speaking to His disciples of the coming events leading up to the cross, ended with these words, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace” (John 16:33). There could be no peace, even for disciples, without the Lord; but, with trust in Him, they could enjoy full peace in all the harsh problems of that moment.

This peace with God now means that we have the power to deal with present sin. Paul writes to the Romans, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof...for sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (6:12,14). When peace with God is established through the death of the Lord Jesus, there is lasting peace that cannot fail. Harmony with God is re-established for ever!

The peace of God

When we first believe, accepting the work of the Lord Jesus and taking Him as our Saviour, there is a tremendous change within us. The Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives and we rejoice in the for-

givenness of sins. But before long, we find that some things in our lives have not changed as we might think they should. Difficulties, dangers, problems – these still surround us. What can we do?

The Bible does not promise a life of ease to the believer. On the contrary, we find that life as it should be lived in obedience to God's word is intended to mature us as believers and prepare us for the presence of the Lord. In all the trials, we need the peace of God to sustain us. Let us note the following:

1. The Lord Jesus gives His own peace to His disciples. When He was about to leave them, He said to them, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). The Lord Jesus was saying that the peace that was His, part of His personal character, He was going to impart to His disciples. He could never lose it, because He is peace, but that peace should now characterise all His disciples. As believers, subject to the Lord and to the Father, we can have this peace in every circumstance!

The peace which the Lord Jesus enjoyed is vividly seen in the Gospels. He had been very active teaching the people. In the evening, both the Lord and the disciples entered a ship to go to the other side of the lake. Being tired, He fell asleep leaving the disciples to row the ship. A storm soon broke and the ship was in danger of sinking, so the disciples awoke their Lord. "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" they cried. Having rebuked the storm, Jesus asked them, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" (see Mark 4:35-41). The Lord was at total peace in those frightening conditions.

How wonderful that peace with God can allow man's trust in God to be so comforting! The psalmist could say, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8). Peace with God provides the solid ground for each one of us to enjoy the peace of God in a world of shifting sands!

2. This gift of peace is a possession we develop as believers. In Galatians 5:22,23, we find that the Holy Spirit develops nine gifts from God in every believer. The first three of these are given by the Lord Himself, and listed in the Gospel of John as love, joy, peace. Now this epistle shows that the Holy Spirit develops them, along with others, in our lives. Little by little, as we come to know our Lord better, these gifts should become more real and operative in our lives.

Paul and Silas give us a good example of how this works out in practice. As a result of their public testimony to the power of their Lord, they were beaten and imprisoned in Philippi (see Acts 16). This should have depressed them if anything would! Had God let them down? Never! At midnight, they began singing and

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep

praising God. Had it been written then, they might well have sung the hymn by Mrs Will Murphy:

There's a peace in my heart that the world never gave,
 A peace it can not take away;
 Though the trials of life may surround like a cloud,
 I've a peace that has come there to stay.
 Constantly abiding, Jesus is mine;
 Constantly abiding, rapture divine;
 He never leaves me lonely, whispers oh! so kind:
 "I will never leave thee". Jesus is mine!

The more we grow in our communion with our Lord, the more we will enjoy this peace.

3. This peace is just as active in troubling circumstances. Paul writes, "Be careful for (anxious about) nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6,7). When we trust the Lord in difficulty, we may have to own that we do not understand the peace that He gives, but the promise is certain! All the feelings and senses of our innermost being – the heart – and the concerns of our thoughts – the mind – are surrounded, as by soldiers surrounding a fort, by this peace we have through Christ Jesus.

Elisha knew that peace. In 2 Kings 6, the story is told of a war between Israel and Syria. Each time the king of Syria set an ambush for Israel, Elisha was able to warn the king of Israel about it. The king of Syria thought that he had a traitor in his own ranks and asked who was giving away the secret plans. His servants point him to Elisha, so the king sends a great host to Dothan to take Elisha. The man of God is totally at peace in these circumstances but his servant cannot understand why. He says to Elisha, "Alas, my master! How shall we do?" Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant and, as God did so, the servant saw "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (v.17). No wonder Elisha remained at peace! So can you and I, even in desperate circumstances!

4. There is another side to all of this. Although the peace of God is available to every believer, we must ensure that we use this peace. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...and be ye thankful", Paul tells the Colossians (3:15). Don't let us ignore that little word 'let'. The word 'rule' can be better translated 'umpire'. An umpire maintains a proper balance between the parties and controls what is taking place. So it is in the problems of life. We face a problem and, perhaps, we do not know what to do, but we commend the matter to the Lord in prayer. In our consideration, we sense a satisfaction with one solution which arises. This satisfaction we call peace, the peace of God, which acts as an umpire in our mind

bringing us to the point of following what is pleasing to the Lord. We gladly let the Lord lead us in the decisions we have to make.

That peace puts a responsibility upon us all. Paul writes, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace” (Romans 14:19). Again, we read, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness...” (Hebrews 12:14). Peace with God allows us to display that peace day by day in every part of our lives. This allows no room for criticising or attacking one another. If we do so, we are not following those things that make for peace.

The God of peace



We learn from Scripture that one of the great characteristics of this matchless Person, the eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creator and maintainer of all things, is that He is the God of peace. Active

harmony is His great purpose, a harmony with the man He made. How small this makes us feel – that this great God should be so concerned with us! It is useful to list some of His activities as the God of peace.

1. The God of peace unites. Paul writes, “Now the God of peace be with you all” (Romans 15:33). Paul had been asking his readers to “strive together” in their prayers for him, so that he could be freed to continue his work for the Lord. He sought harmony amongst them and then desired that the God of peace, the real harmonising influence on their lives, would be with them. In Acts 12, we find that Herod had killed James and had imprisoned Peter with the intention of bringing him on trial before the people. The believers gathered together and prayed all night. Here was true striving together in prayer and the God of peace answered their prayers in releasing Peter. Here is a unity which worked.
2. The God of peace desires to set us apart from the influences of the world: “The very God of peace sanctify you (set you apart) wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). This God of peace will wholly set us apart from this world’s allurements. The apostle desired that in the completeness of spirit, soul and body there would be a maturity, a freedom from blame in the sight



Now the God of peace be with you all

of God, for every one of His children. There is, perhaps, more spoiling of the Christian testimony through attachment to the world and its evil influences than in any other way. Today, our practical sanctification is just as vital! As we stand before our Lord at the judgment seat of Christ, our entry into the glory of eternity will be so much happier if it can be accompanied with His “Well done”.

3. The God of peace desires to perfect us. The writer ends his letter to the Hebrews with his desires for them. One of these (13:20,21) is that the God of peace will make them perfect, that is, will bring them to full maturity for their Christian testimony. The reason for this is that it has already cost God the life of His Son whom He has brought back from the dead. So He desires the greatest blessing for His children while they are still in this world. It surely must be our greatest desire to be worthy of the One who gave His life for us!
4. Paul gives us himself as an example to follow, knowing that the God of peace desires to encourage. He writes, “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4:9). The whole aim of Paul’s life, since he received new life from his Saviour, was to walk worthily of his Lord. As a result, he knew the presence of the God of peace. What an example for us to follow today!

In his missionary journeys, Paul was ready to suffer, even almost to death (Acts 14, etc.); he sat down quietly by the riverside in Philippi with a group of women and explained the Gospel (Acts 16); he was seen publicly alleging the value of the work of Christ (Acts 17); he would take nothing from the Christians in Corinth when he was with them, lest he be a burden to them (2 Corinthians 11:9); and in many other ways he demonstrated his walk with the Lord. Like Paul, we can find much encouragement from the God of peace as we walk with Him.

5. Sadly, there are, even amongst Christians, those who will cause divisions; they bring in dissension. This is a terrible and unnecessary diversion which plays into the hands of the enemy. “Avoid such”, the apostle tells the Romans (16:17); they do not serve Christ. But who is in control? “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (v.20). How good it is to have this God, whose character is peace, supporting the believer! We can leave all things in His care.
 6. The God of peace sets the pattern. “Finally, brethren, farewell,” Paul writes to the Corinthians. “Be perfect (or ‘mature’), be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11). Let us ensure that the God of love and peace is with us every day!
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The Sure Purposes of God

Part 2

Jim Wolf

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33). We can surely share Paul’s sense of wonder at the purposes of God. Sometimes in Scripture God lifts the curtains on those purposes so that we might worship Him the more.

“Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt” (Numbers 13:22).

Hebron

In part 1, we looked at Hebron as a place of friendship and communion with God in the experiences of Abraham, Jacob and Caleb. After the children of Israel entered and occupied the land God had promised them, God gave them peace for seven years. Had they continued in obedience to God that peace would have continued. However, we read that they turned to worship strange gods and God turned away from them.

Moving on around 350 years, we find the nation in crisis. The judges were acting unrighteously, taking bribes from the people. 1 Samuel 8:1-7 gives us the background to this sorry state of affairs.

As a consequence, the people come to Samuel asking, “Make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (v.5). God grants their request, but says to Samuel, “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (v.7). Why did they want to be like the nations? Had they but realised it, their strength and uniqueness lay in the fact that they were not as other nations! They were marked out in the purposes of

God to fulfil a special place in the divine plan. They had the living God, Jehovah, who was greater than all in strength, power and majesty. Had they trusted Him fully and without reserve, He would have prospered them above and beyond anything they could have wished!

Although the nation had rejected the rule of Jehovah established at Sinai, through which God was to bless both them and the other nations, Jehovah did not reject them! The visible symbol of God’s presence was the shekinah glory that entered and filled the Tabernacle at the establishment of the nation at Sinai. That same glory led the Israelites into the land, was manifested in the Temple of Solomon, and departed spectacularly from Jerusalem as the kingdom came to an end with the Babylonian captivity. Then God gave governmental sovereignty to the Gentiles. Jehovah had ruled through divinely chosen prophets and judges and, later, He retained unto Himself the right to choose their king by direct control (1 Samuel 9:17; Hosea 13:11). The king was made personally responsible to God for his actions (1 Samuel 13:13,14).

Saul is chosen and proclaimed king by the people. All goes well for a while and

the kingship is established. But Saul then starts to do things in his own strength, independently of God's leading. Saul's failure and the rejection of Saul by God inevitably follow. We have a similar warning in the New Testament. God's solemn message to the church at Ephesus is, "I have against you that you have left your first love. I will come unto you and remove your candlestick unless you repent" (see Revelation 2:1-7). Then, as now, God's desire for His own is that they should love Him and be consistent in that love.

David, the son of Jesse, is anointed king by Samuel but he does not immediately take up his position as king. When God is going to use a person for some great work, there is often a prior period of preparation. We see this in Moses with his 40 years in the back side of the desert. Joseph had to suffer separation from his family, false imprisonment and humiliation, before God could begin to use him for the work for which He had been preparing him. So David also goes through a period of learning, looking after his father's sheep, learning the arts of war as Saul's armour bearer, becoming a champion of the people by slaying Goliath, and many other experiences. More importantly, David continues his lessons of complete and utter dependence upon God, both in his time of rejection and when opportunities for service arose. David learned to give God the honour and praise, awaiting God's time with patience. Well might it be said of David

that he was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22).

However the time comes when God utterly rejects Saul and all his family. Saul and all his sons are killed in battle with the Philistines. David, fighting on another front, defeats the army of the Philistines and returns to his stronghold of Ziklag. There he learns of the death of Saul and of Jonathan, his great friend. David then enquires of the Lord as to his course of action and is told to go up to Hebron (2 Samuel 2:1). David's actions teach us an important threefold lesson:

1. The importance of taking everything to God in prayer.
2. The need to accept God's plan for each of us individually. That plan might involve great things, as with David, or it might be something quite small. One thing is sure – it is something only you can do.
3. Go where you are directed. David could have said, "I am the anointed king. I will go up to Jerusalem and claim the throne." However, he took the right course by first praying for guidance, then following out his instructions, waiting God's time.

So David goes up to Hebron to be recognised as king by Judah. Israel was slow to recognise him but eventually all Israel come to David at Hebron (1 Chronicles 12:38-40). In part 1, we saw that 'Hebron' means 'friendship'. Appropriately then, the whole nation comes together in peace and friendship to Hebron to serve under David's leader-

Awaiting God's time with patience

ship. We see in v.38 (the chapter is worth reading in its entirety) that the men of war who “could keep rank came with a perfect heart to Hebron to make David king”.

To keep rank would suggest discipline, training and a willingness to act in harmony. We also need to be among those who have gone through discipline and training in the school of God. We need to be disciplined both in our personal and in our assembly lives so that we might walk together in harmony. All Israel were of one heart to make David king. Oh, that the assemblies today were in such harmony that those who own the Lordship and Headship of Christ were also in perfect heart with each other!

In v.39, we are told of another service. Those who were already with David had made preparations for the arrival of their brethren. How good it is when we make preparation before coming together in fellowship, especially for the spiritual food that we may enjoy together and also for any physical food. The result of their preparations was that it stimulated others also to give (v.40). The result of all this was that “there was joy in Israel”.

All was in accord with God’s purposes for Israel. They were in the right place, Hebron, with the right man, David. Consequently, there is perfect communion. All this would show us, in picture form, how David’s life looks forward to the Lord’s own life as the Man who will



fulfil all God's purposes perfectly. We can look forward to the day when He will be acclaimed both Lord and Christ by all to the glory of God the Father.

David reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. Those seven years of relative obscurity speak to us of communion and entering into the purposes of God while still undisplayed in their full effect. Thirty-three years of a more public reign in Jerusalem bring out David's wider glory as owned and known by both Jew and Gentile. This would remind us that the Lord is now in relative obscurity as far as this world is concerned, but one day His glory will cover the whole world as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

Zoan

We now leave Hebron, with its picture of friendship and communion, and look at Zoan. This city was the centre of government in lower Egypt and is probably the place where Joseph met his brothers during his administration of the food programme. It was known by several names, Raamses being the most probable while Pharaoh held his court there. The land of Goshen where the nation of Israel dwelt (a nation within a nation) bordered it.

Egypt in Scripture is looked on as a type of the world and its corrupt systems. After Joseph, we then read, "There arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). He certainly had no appreciation of the God whom

Joseph had worshipped. The rulers at that time seem to have been afraid of the numbers and the power of Israelites. They oppressed them to such a degree that they were nothing but slave labour.

All that symbolises Egypt is headed up in Zoan – the name means 'motion'. This would speak to us of the restlessness of the world and its continual search for gain and pleasure. Isaiah writes, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57: 20,21). But the Lord Jesus could say to His disciples, just before He left them, "...in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Zoan is mentioned seven times in Scripture. Our text, "Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt", is the first mention. Each mention signifies the world away from God. Isaiah writes, "Surely the princes of Zoan are fools" (Isaiah 19:11). Speaking of a person as a fool, in Scriptural parlance, is not quite the same as today's meaning of the word. Scripture says, "The fool hath said in his heart, No God" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1 – this double repetition is surely significant). There is a parallel statement in 1 Corinthians 2:5-8. Our faith, our knowledge of God, does not come by man's wisdom, but by the power of God. That wisdom He has hidden from the world

*...Him who worketh all things
after the counsel of His own will*

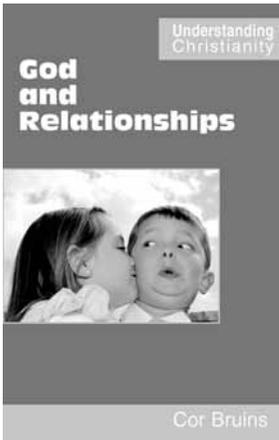
but “destined for our glory before time began”. V.8 is especially telling: “Wisdom...which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”. The crucifixion was the greatest folly ever committed by man yet, of it, we can but echo Joseph’s words to his brothers, “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good...to save much people” (Genesis 50:20). Our salvation was not by the wisdom, or the foolishness, of man, but was all worked out in the far back ages of eternity. God’s ways and His wisdom are past finding out!

We have looked at some of God’s purposes with regard to the nation of Israel. In Ephesians 1, we see how God’s purposes are being worked out in those who have owned His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as Lord and Saviour. In vv.11-18, we can trace our link with Hebron. Caleb’s inheritance in Hebron was his reward for faithfully following God’s word. How much greater the reward for following Christ today! We also have obtained an inheritance, but not because of any good that we have done. Rather, it was in the “purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (v.11). We also have “the earnest of our inheritance” (v.14) here and now. As Caleb had the grapes of Eshcol (Numbers 13:23,24) to show others what the inheritance was all about, so we have a foretaste of our inheritance now in this world. One aspect of this is when we come together in sweet fellowship and communion with one another and speak of the things concerning Christ. This comes out more

especially in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper when we come together to remember Him in His life, His death, His resurrection and His ascension to glory. His place now is at His Father’s right hand. We look forward to His soon return when He will redeem the pledge He made to take us to be with Himself, that we might “be to the praise of his glory” (v.12). Read again this tremendous chapter and ponder for a while on the sure purposes of God for those who love God and wait for His Son from heaven.

We have seen that Hebron is linked to God’s purposes and disclosed for faith’s communion. Zoan is linked to the great world systems whose inevitable end is the fire of divine wrath (see Ezekiel 30). How wonderfully significant, then, becomes our opening text: “Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt”. The purposes of God for the blessing of man originated in the far back ages of eternity, long before the systems of man had their being. When the time was appropriate in God’s calendar, Hebron was established. It is also significant that Hebron exists today, while there are only ruins to mark the place where Zoan is thought to have been. God’s ways are wonderful! They are past finding out (Romans 11:33). But what has been revealed to us in the pages of Scripture is well worth studying, “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:17).

In our next study, we will (D.V.) look at Jericho and its place in the purposes of God for the blessing of man.



A New Publication from Scripture Truth

God and Relationships

by Cor Bruins

This book covers many aspects of our relationships with God and one another. It is primarily intended for young Christians who may be entering on a relationship, or who are newly-weds, or who have a young family. Consequently it deals with topics and issues, some of them quite sensitive, which are likely to be faced by these groups.

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Some years ago Cor Bruins was invited to lead a young married couples' weekend. It was a weekend that will be remembered for Cor's helpful and warm ministry of God's Word on the subject of family life. It was enriched by Cor's own marriage to his wife, Audrey, and their experiences of bringing up a family of eight children. They did this whilst engaged in many years of missionary service in Egypt and Lebanon, followed by a teaching ministry in Europe which continues to this day.

This book crystallises Cor's thoughts on the many aspects of our relationship with God and one another. It explores the development of loving and strong relationships leading to marriage. By reference to the Bible it deals with the practicalities of married life and confronts many of the challenges modern Western society poses to the Christian's position in regard to relationships, sexual attitudes, divorce, the use of money, mutual welfare and the care of children.

What Cor writes will certainly encourage young people to think carefully about preparing for a lifelong relationship. It will ensure those of us who have been married for many years do not take our relationships for granted. And it will make us all think and pray more carefully about our responsibility, as God's children, to witness to the value of the pattern of life He introduced for our happiness and the well-being of society.

Chapter 1: God's Master-plan for Man

Chapter 2: Marriage in Today's Perverted World

Chapter 3: "The Way of a Man with a Maiden"

Chapter 4: More Than Friendship?

Chapter 5: Understanding the Lord's Will

Chapter 6: Engagement

Chapter 7: Marriage

Chapter 8: The Purpose of Sex

Chapter 9: Guidelines for Happiness in Home and Assembly

Chapter 10: The Marriage Relationship

Chapter 11: Family Planning

Chapter 12: How to Bring Up Children in a Godly Way

Chapter 13: Facing Facts – Conflicts in the Family

Chapter 14: Discipline and Nurture

Chapter 15: Riding the Storms of Life

Chapter 16: Divorce and Remarriage

Chapter 17: Sex Education

Chapter 18: Single and Happy

Appendix: Questions for Discussion

Scripture Truth

“Your words were found and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16)

Your words were found, and I did eat them;
they were rejoicing to my heart.
World, devil, flesh – Your words defeat them
and are my ornament and guard.
The great and glorious God they show:
Himself in His dear Son to know.

Sweet to my mouth; when eaten – bitter!
What holy claims Your words possess!
Just condemnation is their letter –
but Spirit spells God’s righteousness.
Hell-sentencing – forgiving free!
sweeter than honeycomb to me.

Word of our God that stands for ever
while flesh-man’s glory fades as grass.
Faith disregards man’s vain endeavour –
God’s word alone will come to pass.
And all His promises stand sure,
His glory in Christ’s death secure.

Word of the cross, in world’s eyes foolish,
speaks Christ, God’s wisdom and God’s power;
uncomprehended by the schoolish,
revealed to babes – oh, glorious hour!
Word that brings strongholds crashing down;
Word of His grace, His cross, His crown.

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