

Scripture Truth

October - December 2007

Psalms 21

Walking with Christ

King Asa and leaning on God

A Look at Nehemiah for Today

Stephen, Paul and
the Sidelining of Israel

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

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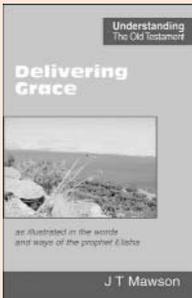
Delivering Grace

by J T Mawson

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King Asa and leaning on God

Philip Nunn

“Paint me, warts and all,” is supposed to have been Oliver Cromwell’s instruction to his portrait painter. That’s how the Bible paints even its heroes. Read this article, and learn from the life of king Asa about the connection between dependence and action in the Christian life, and between independence and failure.

Doing and depending

Back in 1792, William Carey published an eighty-seven page pamphlet stating the obligation of Christians to actively pursue the conversion of the heathen. Carey urged Protestants to organize themselves to evangelize the world. “Young man,” said one of his many critics, “when God pleases to convert the heathen He will do it without your aid or mine.” Perhaps every Christian community lives with this tension. There are the active men and women who go out and “do things,” and also those devout believers who pray and wait for God to “do things.” The life of king Asa teaches that *both* are necessary: diligence *and* dependence.

Asa succeeded his father as king of Judah at quite a young age. The main events of his forty-one year reign (c.910-870 BC) are outlined in 2 Chronicles chapters 14, 15 and 16.

1. Pleasing the Lord from the start (2 Chronicles 14:1-8)

How many years would Asa be given for reforming Judah? The future is always uncertain. The time for action, for obedience, for reform, is the present. As soon as Asa became king, he “removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles” (14:3 NIV). Does something in your life need changing? Is your family or local church living in spiritual decadence? Revival usually starts with, and must involve, conviction of sin and confession. Then follow radical practical changes. What does the Lord want you to “remove,” “smash” or “cut down” in your life?

Like Asa, it is best to seek to please God from the start. If we postpone the correct action, we may become comfortable with the disorder. Are you starting something new? Found a new job? Moved to a new house? Recently married? Started in a new school? Don’t wait: take concrete steps to please God *now*.

Revival is much more than destroying what is evil. King Asa was also dynamic in encouraging the people in three good areas:

- *Relationship with God*: “He commanded Judah to seek the LORD” (14:4) – he knew that without a genuine relationship with the Lord, they would only have a dry, mechanical religion.

- *Obedience to God:* He instructed them “to obey” God’s “laws and commands” (14:4) – restoration begins in the heart but always requires some specific action.
- *Vision:* He encouraged them to “build up these towns... and put walls round them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours...” (14:7,8) – he taught them to appreciate, protect and build up their God-given inheritance. What has God given you? A set of difficult children? A selfish partner? A boring job? A body with a frustrating weakness? A small struggling local church? Some day soon we shall enjoy perfection. In heaven. But now, on earth, we are called to appreciate, to protect and to build up what the Lord has given us: “The land is still ours.”

2. Relying on the Lord while facing uncertainty (2 Chronicles 14:9-15)

To defend the southern kingdom, Asa strengthened his army. “Asa had an army of three hundred thousand men from Judah, equipped with large shields and with spears, and two hundred and eighty thousand from Benjamin, armed with small shields and with bows. All these were brave fighting men” (14:8). Big enough? No! “Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots” (14:9 RSV). Asa was outnumbered! However well we prepare ourselves, unexpected events and overwhelming difficulties may come our way. For some, it may be the announcement of cancer, the reality of divorce or the unexpected death of a loved one. For others it could be failing an important exam, the negation of a visa, the loss of a job, bankruptcy, or an emotional division in the local church.

Asa was facing disaster. What options were open to him? He could have run away, sought alliance with Zerah or another king, or charged forward with suicidal determination. But Asa decided to pray. “LORD, there is no-one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O LORD our God, for *we rely on you*, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O LORD, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you.” (14:11 NIV). Asa chose to rely, to lean, to trust on the Lord. And, in fact, it is when we feel small, weak, alone and helpless before the uncertain future, that we are best positioned to lean on the Lord. The Lord Himself made this clear to Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” And Paul experienced this strength that comes by choosing to rely on the Lord: “for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9,10).

But relying on the Lord does not imply inactivity. After expressing their weakness and their dependence on the Lord, Asa and his brave soldiers still had to face the

enemy and fight. And “the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah” (14:12 RSV). If you are presently facing uncertain and difficult times, *consciously choose* to rely on the Lord, like Asa. Then calmly and courageously face the future, with the peace and strength that He gives. When we rely on Him, we allow Him to work. Diligent dependence is an essential trait of all “God’s fellow-workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9 NIV).

3. Listening to the Lord through others (2 Chronicles 15:1-8)

At this point Asa was feeling tired and a bit discouraged. The Lord noticed this and sent Azariah (or maybe Oded, or both – the translations differ) with an encouraging message (15:1, 8). God used this prophet to assure Asa of

- *His presence*: “The Lord is with you when you are with him” (15:2).
- *A reward*: “But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for *your work will be rewarded*” (15:7).

Most of us also go through times of tiredness and discouragement. But God will use fellow-believers to bring encouragement to us from His Word. When Paul sensed discouragement among some saints at Corinth, he wrote, “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58). We also need to reflect, absorb and believe these promises. “When Asa heard these words... he took courage” (15:8). Sometimes the Lord speaks to our heart directly. But... quite often, He chooses to speak to us through others. He may desire to encourage, correct or challenge you through that fragile old sister, through that young inexperienced preacher, through that boring or boisterous singer, through that Christian you doctrinally disagree with. Don’t ignore them!

4. Moving others by personal example (2 Chronicles 15:9-19)

Encouraged, Asa pressed on with his reforms. Two actions are highlighted: (1) *Cleanliness*: “He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim” (15:8). Asa



Temple of Baal-Berith with Mt Gerazim and Mt Ebal

*Does your devotion to the Lord
inspire those around you?*

even removed what was offensive to the Lord within his own family (15:16). (2) *Worship*: “He repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the portico of the LORD’s temple” (15:8). Asa prepared the infrastructure so that the people of God could worship Jehovah and offer Him sacrifices. Seeing these changes, “large numbers had come over to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him” (15:9). Do others find your Christian lifestyle attractive? Is the presence of God felt in some way in your home and Christian meetings? True godliness, genuine holiness, is life-giving and is attractive. It is instructive to reflect for a moment on why a holy Jesus attracted publicans, prostitutes and sinners. Why did they seek out His company? Would such feel comfortable and warmly welcomed in your local church?

How did the kingdom of Judah respond to Asa’s initiatives? (1) *They worshipped*: “They assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa’s reign. At that time they sacrificed to the LORD seven hundred head of cattle and seven thousand sheep and goats” (15:10,11). Now that the altar of the Lord was repaired, there was renewed joy and spontaneous generosity in offering to the Lord. A desire to worship is a sign of renewal. (2) *They recommitted themselves*: “They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul... All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholeheartedly. They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them” (15:12-15). Asa’s devotion to the Lord moved others to a deeper spiritual experience.

King Asa’s words and actions inspired and changed a whole nation. You and I also have a (smaller) sphere of influence. Does your devotion to the Lord inspire those around you? Your level of preparation and interest in your weekly Bible study group? Your participation in the prayer and worship meetings, the tone of your voice as you sing to the Lord? Your degree of interest and commitment to fellow-Christians in your local congregation, your practical concern for those in need? Such actions move others in one way or another. “Set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity... Do not neglect the gift you have... Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress” (1 Timothy 4:12-15 RSV).

5. Relying on cleverness and experience (2 Chronicles 16)

Ever since the nation of Israel had divided, there had been constant rivalry and frequent aggression between Israel (the northern ten tribes) and Judah (the southern two tribes). “In the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s reign Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah” (16:1 NIV). But Asa fought this war differently from his first war. Experience provides calm confidence but easily erodes our dependence on the Lord. In this war, king Asa chose to trust in his own strength and cleverness:

- (a) *Asa’s freedom was threatened.* Ramah was only about 6 km north of Jerusalem, and Baasha’s fortifying of it seriously threatened his freedom and future. In the first war, when Asa had had little experience, he had relied on the Lord alone. This time, he sent messengers to the gentile king of Damascus offering him a huge bribe for breaking his alliance with Baasha (16:3). This clever strategy worked. Israel was attacked from Damascus and Baasha was forced to withdraw from Ramah. By removing the construction materials Baasha had assembled at Ramah (16:6) Asa recouped some of his initial investment as well. But how did the Lord view this line of action? He sent a prophet named Hanani to Asa to show him the difference between the two wars. When attacked from Ethiopia, “you relied on the LORD, [and] he delivered them into your hand” (16:8). But in this war, Asa relied on astuteness, silver, gold, and unhealthy alliances. When your freedoms are threatened, how do you respond? When you engage in Christian service, do you still choose to rely, lean, and depend on Him? “Lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him... Do not be wise in your own eyes” (Proverbs 3:5-7). Do not forget the danger of experience!
- (b) *Asa’s reputation was threatened.* Once the crisis blew over, Asa must have felt quite pleased with himself. His experienced political manouevring had brought peace and allowed for more prosperity. But the prophet Hanani assessed the situation differently: “You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war” (16:9). Hanani’s view was very sound. Why had Asa chosen to rely on man and not on God? God is good. He wants to bless.

*Do not forget
the danger of experience!*

“For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (16:9). Now Asa’s reputation was at stake. Leaders and politicians do not like to be accused of foolishness, and specially not when enjoying high support ratings. He could not admit failure. Instead of humbling himself, “Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison” (16:10). How do you react when your reputation is threatened? Do you invite, listen and benefit from criticism? Remember that *there may be a word of the Lord for you* hidden among those hurtful comments!

- (c) *Asa’s health was threatened.* “In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the LORD, but only from the physicians” (16:12). What did the elderly Asa do wrong? The above verse should not be understood as dismissive of doctors and physicians. Jesus approved of the role of doctors when He said. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (Matthew 9:12). However when Asa’s health was threatened, he *leaned on* the physicians. Faith does not dismiss the need to plan, to work, to fight – and to seek medical attention. But faith is *trust*. We must be diligent – but trusting, depending, leaning on our good Lord. These words are still necessary at all times of life, including old age with its frustrating weaknesses and limitations.

Conclusion

Asa was no perfect king. And yet the Lord’s verdict was: “Nevertheless the heart of Asa was blameless all his days” (15:17 RSV). You and I may also have moments of sad failure, we may leave important jobs unfinished, we may not always live up to our calling... but does our *heart* continue to lean on the Lord? Happily we serve a very gracious God: “He will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same *diligence to the very end*” (Hebrews 6:10-11 NIV). The Lord still blesses diligent dependence. So let’s press on, consciously choosing to depend on Him. The three-thousand-year old promise still stands: “But as for you, be firm and let not your hands be weak; for there is a reward for your deeds” (2 Chronicles 15:7, Darby version).



*The Lord still
blesses diligent dependence*

Walking with Christ

David Anderson

Is your Christian life going anywhere? It won't be, if you haven't started to walk, in the full Bible meaning of this verb. Read on!

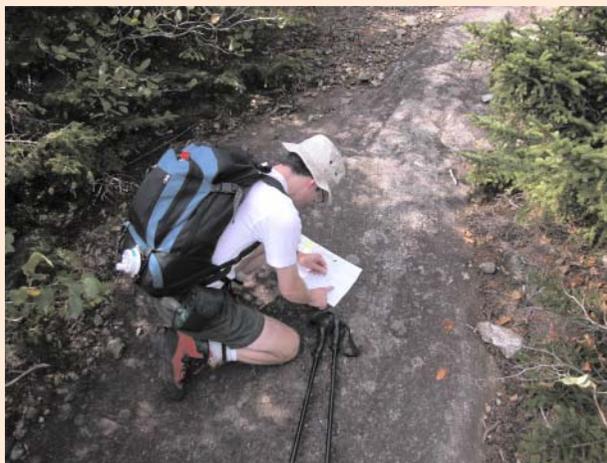
Have you started to walk?

How did John Bunyan depict the Christian life? *As a walk*. He got the idea from the apostle Paul who, under inspiration, often compared the Christian life to a walk (see below). The Lord Jesus Himself spoke of discipleship as a walk (John 8:12). In no way did this mean a short stroll. Rather, a life-long fell-walk, as Bunyan vividly depicts in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. To go successfully on a fell-walk, you have to make a definite decision to go, decide your objectives, make necessary advance preparations including a map (Psalm 119:105 NKJV), and dress appropriately. When on the walk you have to maintain an appropriate pace and “walk circumspectly” (i.e. observe the Country Code! Compare Romans 13:14).

The Christian “walk” is an all-embracing occupation. It is no mere matter of meetings and acting appropriately at them! Of the 96 New-Testament occurrences of the Greek verb *peripateo*, about 42 mean “walk” in the literal sense. All its remaining occurrences speak figuratively of conduct, manner of life. Very often, newer versions translate this verb

as “live.” (The major Hebrew word for “walk” in the Old Testament means “to live, to regulate one’s life, to conduct oneself, to pass one’s life.”)

Scripture Truth is for readers who want to live for Christ. This article is for those who, as the hymn says, “want to walk with Jesus Christ all the days [they] live of [their lives] on earth, to give to Him complete control of body and of soul.” Do you want to “lead a life [“walk,” KJV] worthy of the Lord” who saved you, to “walk worthy of God?” (Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12) Certainly, “by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9). However, our conduct is a good indicator of what we



really believe! The Lord Jesus knows those who truly believe on Him and that all others, in the end, will turn back and no longer walk with Him (John 6:60-66). There are also real Christians who walk “disorderly and not according to the tradition...received from [the apostles].” But, if they are real, they can be made ashamed of their actions and repent (2 Thessalonians 3:6,11,14).

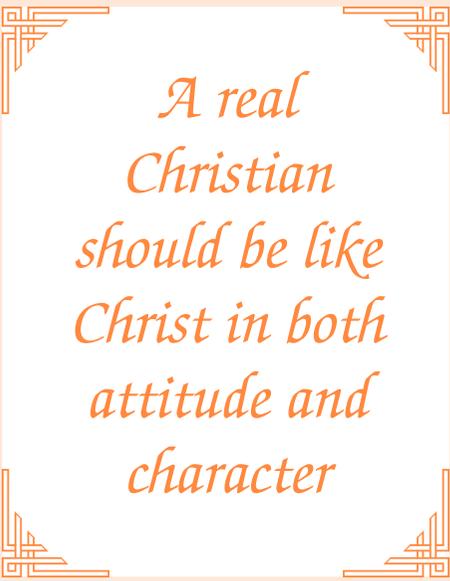
To walk as Christ walked

Thus, the true Christian’s heart will respond to John’s statement: “whoever says he abides in Him ought [himself also] to walk in the same way in which He walked” (1 John 2:6 ESV). John was reinforcing what he had reported the Lord saying about abiding in Himself, the true Vine (John 15:4-7). A real Christian should be like Christ in both attitude and character. The apostles were recognised as those who “had been with Jesus” (Acts 5:13), when, for their

Master and like their Master, they courted martyrdom. In discussing suffering as a Christian, Peter said, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth;’ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:21-23; cp.4:16).

The true Christian will also follow the example of the apostles. Paul exhorts us in Philippians 3:17: “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (see also 2 Corinthians 12:1, 1 Corinthians 11:1 & 1 Timothy 1:15). The twenty-first-century Christian lifestyle should be no different from the first-century Christian lifestyle! Contrariwise, the lifestyle of those making a mere pretence of Christianity finds them out: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ... who set their mind on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19).

The true Christian is God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). After healing the man at the pool of Bethesda who had no power to walk, the Lord told him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more” (John 5:14 NKJV). He now had power to “walk” – figuratively as well as literal-



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*The true
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also follow the
example of the
apostles*

ly! It is *because* we have been saved by grace, that our lives *must change* from what they were before our salvation: “you [are now] alive, who were [previously] dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world... among whom also we all once [walked] in the lusts of our flesh... I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind” (Ephesians 2:1-3 & 4:17 NKJV). At least seven characteristics of the ways of unbelievers are given in Ephesians 4:17-5:21. Their ways are aimless, blind, ungodly, shameless, sordid, indecent and insatiable. The way Christians live must be fundamentally different from unbelievers.

But most of the New Testament exhortations about the Christian walk are positive, not negative. Ephesians provides much guidance on the positive. First of all, we are to be like God Himself, who is both love and light,

because we are part of His family (Ephesians 5:1). Secondly, we must also imitate Christ (5:2). Earlier in this letter, Paul urges us to “walk worthy” of our calling and, as we have already seen, to be different from the rest of mankind (4:1, 17). This “calling” is the subject of the doctrinal part of Ephesians (chs.1-3), and is variously described as a high or heavenly calling, and a holy calling. Our lives should openly show that God has called us to be His children, that is, His adopted sons.

Because our walk must be commensurate with, and reflect, our calling, Paul explains what to “walk worthy” really means in the practical section of this epistle (chs. 4-6):

1. “*Walk in love*, as Christ also has loved us, and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:2).
2. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. *Walk as children of light*” (Ephesians 5:8).
3. “See then that you *walk circumspectly*, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

I. Walk in Love

“Walking in love” is our response to Christ having loved us (5:2). In life and death our Saviour showed that He loved the Lord His God with all His heart, with all His soul, with all His strength, with His entire mind, and His neighbour as Himself. In His death He demonstrated His love for His church

*If we walk in
the way of
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God*

(5:25). 1 John 3:16 tells us that this is how we know what love really is.

If we walk in the way of sacrificial love, and love God's family, this will bring pleasure to God. We may even have to pay the ultimate price, as Christ did. But, according to Ephesians 4:1-16, we will certainly have to walk with all lowliness and humility; with gentleness and longsuffering; we will certainly have to bear with one another; and to speak the truth to each other *in love*. We must also make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In these ways the church builds up itself in love.

Romans chs.12-15 centre on the love that should both govern and pervade Christian gatherings, internally and

externally, so to speak. Chapter 12:9-16 in particular paints a comprehensive picture of the qualities of Christian love. It is sincere, discerning, affectionate and respectful. It is enthusiastic and patient, generous and hospitable, benevolent and sympathetic. It is marked by good will, harmony and humility. Christian assemblies would be happier communities if we all loved one another like that! All this is clear from Paul's use of the words "one another," "brotherly love" and "the saints."

Then Paul instructs us that Christian love also includes:

- love for enemies (12:17-21)
- love for our neighbours as ourselves (13:8-10).

In 14:12-19, he shows how easy it is "not to walk in love" (v.15) by lacking consideration for the conscience of others.

The fullest description of the character of love is given in 1 Corinthians 13. There we are told it is greater than both faith and hope (v.13). It is the more excellent way (12:31) which constantly must be pursued (14:1) so that the local assembly can function (ch.14) by the correct exercise of its gifts (ch.12). Perhaps Paul felt he had to fully describe love and how it acts to those who seemed to love him less, the more he loved them (2 Corinthians 11:11 & 12:15).

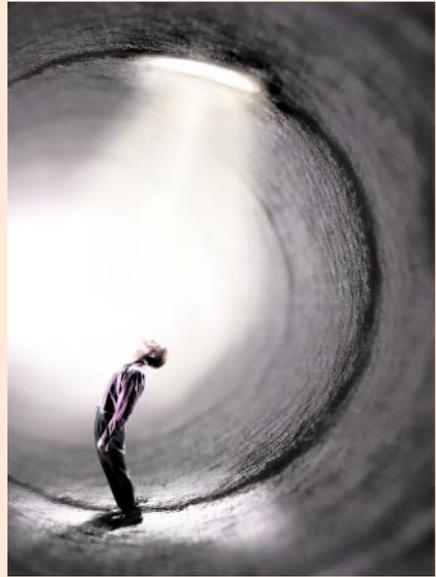
Love is an essential component of godliness, which the man of God must diligently seek after (1 Timothy 1:5 & 6:11). In the words of Ephesians 5:1,

both the character and quality of our love are to be Godlike.

2. Walk as children of light

In Ephesians 5:8-10 Paul also exhorted his readers to “Walk as children of light ...and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord” (ESV). In His true nature, God is light as well as love (1 John 1:7 & 4:8). If we know God, we walk in the light. If our Christianity is *merely* a profession, it is untrue, and we actually walk in darkness. But every true believer lives [“walks”] “in the light” (1 John 1:7), that is, in the knowledge of the complete nature and character of God as completely revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son. Believers are required to “walk worthy” of the God who is light in all areas of their lives (cp. 1 Thessalonians 2:12). They must avoid all evil. There is to be no hint of sexual immorality, any kind of impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking, or greediness amongst God’s people. They are not to be idolatrous (Ephesians 5:3-7). Paul goes on to explain in Ephesians 5:9 & 14 that the fruit of the light is to show all goodness, all righteousness, and every truth; and that we can get this light from Christ Himself by looking up to Him in heaven.

When we walk as children of the light, our conduct both exposes and reproves the dark ways of the sinful world (Ephesians 5:11-13). The Lord Jesus did this in the case of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11). He exposed the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees who brought her to Him. Then He said to her, “Go and sin no more” (John



8:11), and explained how she could change her way of living: “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (v.12). We have to “walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:13-14).

“Walking as children of light” will involve renouncing “disgraceful, underhanded ways” and “by the open statement of the truth [commending ourselves] to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2 ESV). Our lives must honestly reflect the One who is the Light of the world. The Lord Jesus said that when we let our lights shine before men they will glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

The opposite of following the Light of the world is to walk in darkness. Light and love are seen to unite here. The apostle John pointedly states: “But he who hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:11).

How to do all this, is the subject of another article. It is Paul’s great topic in Romans 6 – 8. Central to it is the ringing statement that Christ’s death “condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4).

3. Walk circumspectly

The word translated “circumspectly” in Ephesians 5:15 can mean “accurately” or “in strict conformity to a norm.” Christians must “walk” in line with the Scriptures, which specify what the Lord wants them to do. It also means “carefully”: believers must put careful and prayerful effort into how they live – so we could paraphrase 5:15 as “walk carefully and wisely”. Through detailed and continued reading of the scriptures, and by prayer, each will come to realise what the Lord wants them to be in the various spheres and relationships of life: in the church, in the family (husband/wife, father/children), in the work-place (employee/employer), and in the Christian warfare (friend/foe). The Lord’s will for these is found in Ephesians 5:19 - 6:20, and in other passages of scripture. Specifically, every believer must live out the life assigned to

him/her by the Lord: “But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk” (1 Corinthians 7:17).

The secret of walking wisely is to be filled with the Spirit and to allow Him to control your life (Ephesians 5:18 & Galatians 5:25). It is so easy for the flesh, rather than the Spirit, to guide thoughts and actions. How often I convince myself, “I feel that this is what the Lord wants me to do” when it is actually the prompting of my sinful nature!

We are exhorted to be “redeeming the time”, that is, buying back missed opportunities for “walking wisely,” and waking up to the fact that we do not have much time left in which to live for the Lord. “This also, knowing the time, that it is already time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk becomingly, as in the day; not in carousings and drinking; not in co-habitation and lustful acts; not in strife and envy” (Romans 13:11-13 MKJV).

Today’s world is *full* of snares and traps to “stumble” our “walking with Christ.” This is why a scriptural examination of what it consists in, is so vital. We must keep walking “in love,” “as children of light,” and as “circumspect,” consistently and true to the Christian faith, however strange the world thinks it (see 1 Peter 4:2-4). My prayer is that you and I will walk [“live lives”] worthy of the Lord – that we will walk as He walked!

Psalm 21 – A Celebration of Christ's Victory

Yannick Ford

How much do you get out of the Psalms? Did you realise that this short Psalm celebrates both the present joy, glory and victory of the Lord Jesus and His public glory and victory to come? It is well worth the reader's meditation.

Psalm 21 has long appealed to me, and I often find myself quoting verses from it at the breaking of bread. While it is a Psalm of David, I believe that we can see in it allusions to Christ's victory – His victory over death, and the joy with which He was received at His ascension.

The Psalm commences with the rejoicing of the King: "The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; And in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!" The Lord Jesus is God's chosen King, as we see clearly in Psalm 2:6-7: "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'" It is incredibly uplifting to start with this statement of rejoicing.

Here we
see the
Lord
Jesus
Himself
rejoicing

We know for ourselves that the joy of the Lord is our strength (see Nehemiah 8:10), and here we see the Lord Jesus Himself rejoicing. When on earth, He was the "man of sorrows" according to Isaiah 53:3, but now He is in fullness of joy. Indeed we are told that it was because of the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). Furthermore Psalm 16:11, which is clearly applied to the Lord Jesus by Peter in Acts 2:25-28, states "You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

As a Man of sorrows, the Lord endured many misunderstandings, ridicule, hatred, "such hostility from sinners against Himself"

(Hebrews 12:3), and the awful separation from God when He suffered on the cross. The Lord Jesus was not admired by the world, but was, rather, despised and unwanted. Thus Ter Steegen writes of the “despised and humble Jesus”:¹

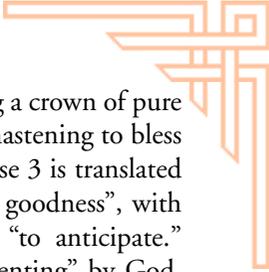
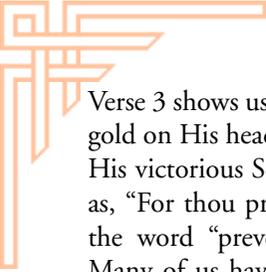
O despised and humble Jesus,
What, compared with Thee,
Are the glory and the beauty
Of all worlds to me?

Now however He is the victorious Conqueror, who has been highly exalted and given a name above every name (Philippians 2:9), and

A contemplation of the Lord in His current joy, strength and glory is very uplifting. It reminds us of what is really important, and of God’s plans for the world and the universe.

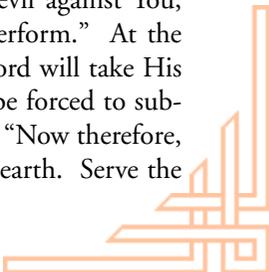
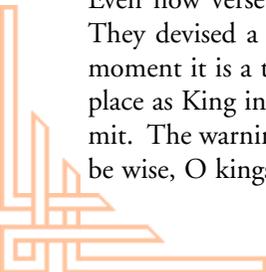
He is sitting at God’s right hand, waiting for His enemies to be made His footstool (Psalm 110:1). It is instructive to consider Him in this way. In many parts of the world today, Christians are persecuted and they lead very difficult lives. In Europe we are not persecuted, but true Christianity and a belief in the Bible are often ridiculed, and are not considered highly by the world. A contemplation of the Lord in His current joy, strength and glory is very uplifting. It reminds us of what is really important, and of God’s plans for the world and the universe.

The second verse of the Psalm tells us that God granted the King’s spoken request. Verse 4 shows us that the request of the King was that he asked for life. This reminds us of Hebrews 5:7: “who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear”. We see the answer to this in Hebrews 7:16, where the Lord is spoken of as a priest of the order of Melchizedek, “according to the power of *an endless life*”. Again, when the Lord presented Himself to John in Revelation 1:18, He says “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I *am alive for evermore.*”



Verse 3 shows us God meeting the King, and setting a crown of pure gold on His head. It is a beautiful picture of God hastening to bless His victorious Son. In the Authorised Version, verse 3 is translated as, “For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness”, with the word “prevent” meaning “to go before,” or “to anticipate.” Many of us have no doubt experienced this “preventing” by God. W.S. Plumer, in his study on the Psalms, says of this verse that “God is always preventing men with the blessings of his goodness”. Plumer then quotes Matthew Henry who writes, “When God’s blessings come sooner, and prove richer, than we imagine; when they are given before we prayed for them, nay, when we feared the contrary; then it may be truly said that he prevented us with them.”

“His glory is great in Your salvation; Honour and majesty You have placed upon him” (verse 5). Again, what an uplifting and encouraging thought! As far as the world is concerned, Jesus is dead and buried. This is well illustrated by the governor Festus, who spoke about “a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive” (Acts 25:19). J.N. Darby’s translation reads “a certain Jesus who is dead”. Not so, says our Psalm; on the contrary, “His glory is great in Your salvation”! The first half of verse 6 is interesting as it has been translated either as “For You have made him most blessed forever” (e.g. NKJV), or “For thou hast made him to be blessings for ever” (e.g. J.N. Darby’s translation). No doubt both thoughts are true. The Lord is blessed, and is “exceedingly glad” in God’s presence (second half of verse 6; see also Psalm 16:11), and He is also a constant source of blessing to His own. As our High Priest He “always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).



The second half of the Psalm looks forward to the time when the Lord will be publicly recognised, and His enemies will be destroyed. Even now verse 11 is true – “For they intended evil against You; They devised a plot which they are not able to perform.” At the moment it is a time of grace, but eventually the Lord will take His place as King in this world, and His enemies will be forced to submit. The warning of Psalm 2:10-12 is appropriate: “Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the

LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”

The amazing and humbling truth is that we will be associated with the Lord Jesus in His public glory. He is waiting for us to join Him, and in His great patience He is waiting for others to come to faith in Him. When we look at ourselves it seems hard to believe that the Lord is longing for us, but the Bible tells us that this is so. This is beautifully expressed in a poem by Frances Bevan entitled “The Bride”, from which I quote a few verses:

There, amidst the love and glory,
He is waiting yet;
On His hands a name is graven
He can ne'er forget.

There, amidst the songs of heaven
Sweeter to His ear
Is the footfall through the desert,
Ever drawing near.

There, made ready are the mansions,
Radiant, still, and fair;
But the Bride the Father gave Him
Yet is wanting there.

Let us be encouraged by the present joy of the Lord and the glory that He has. It is a fitting answer to all His sorrows, and we can delight in His enjoyment of the results of “the travail of His soul”.

¹ From G. Ter Steegen's “Golden Timepiece”, as translated by Emma Frances Bevan.

A Look at Nehemiah for Today

Part 13: A dedication parade (Chapter 12)

Ted Murray

After the work that was done by Nehemiah and the people in rebuilding the walls (chs. 3,4), and the necessary work that was then done in them (chs. 5-11), now it was time to dedicate the walls with praise.

Men of God remembered

Chapter 12 is divided into three parts. Verses 1 to 26 list names of the priests and Levites who came up to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua following the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1), and their descendants. Verses 27 to 43 describe the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem. Finally 12: 44 – 13:3 indicate (i) the responsibilities of those who were assigned to the upkeep of the temple worship, (ii) the responsibilities of the whole people for the support of such persons, and (iii) the need for the people to be separate from the surrounding nations.

Verses 1-7 list by name twenty-two priests who returned, and not just by family as in 7:39. Half of these names include the name of Jehovah. The first name, Seraiah, means “Jehovah is Prince.” The last name, Jedaiah, means “Jehovah is Praise.” The other names denote characteristics with which we would do well to identify. The name “Ezra,” meaning “help,” surely suggests a needed characteristic in the society in which we live. Another interesting name is Iddo. Meaning “opportune,” he was possibly the father / grandfather of Zechariah the prophet, whom the Lord used along with Haggai to encourage the people during the rebuilding of the temple (12:16; cp. Zechariah 1:1).

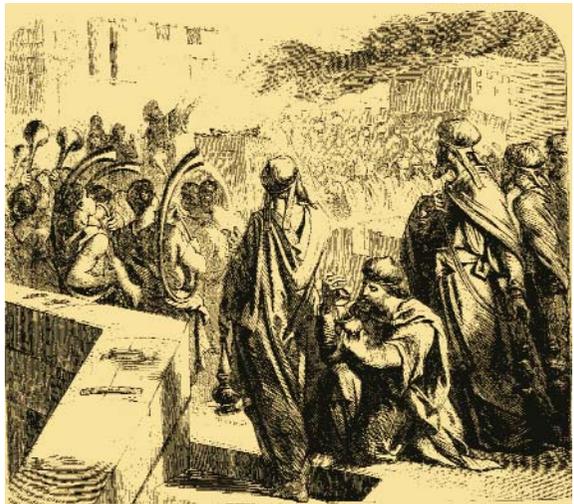
Then, in verses 8-9, Levites’ names are listed. Since two of them coincide with the names of Levites who were said in 11:17 to have volunteered for “Jerusalem service,” it could be that this list, unlike that of the priests in 12:1-7, is not historical but pertaining to Nehemiah’s own time. The Levites “led the thanksgiving [psalms]” (v.8). What a privilege in our day to be able to set the theme of worship, simply by giving out the first hymn; and what a responsibility also, to perform this task faithfully! These lists teach us that God in His grace takes notice of all tasks done for Him. No matter how trivial we may think them, He records them. Small tasks, carried out faithfully week by week by people who do not seek the chief place in the church, are important. Someone ensures that the doors are open in time; someone else that the room is clean and tidy. How poorly we appreciate these apparently little tasks done so faithfully, if we complain about the heating system being too hot or too cold, or the footstools being in the wrong place!

Verses 10-11 give a list of five generations of the line of high priests from Jeshua to Jaddua; and history records a Jadduah who was a great and celebrated high priest in the days of Alexander the Great – about 110 years after Nehemiah’s time. This little paragraph may have been added at a later date, as also verse 22, if “Darius the Persian” is Darius Codomanus, the Persian monarch overthrown by Alexander. It is possible that these additions were done in the time of Malachi. Or maybe these identifications are incorrect. But the resolution of this puzzle is not our concern. “Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” (2 Peter 1:21) and all that they wrote “is for our learning” (Romans 15:4). And our Lord said “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

The integrity of the temple was maintained by the gatekeepers (vv.25-6). The temple of Nehemiah’s day was poor in comparison to Solomon’s, and yet the insignificant remnant who had custody of it sought to act on divine instructions communicated by David to Solomon at the beginning. We, likewise, no matter how feeble and weak our testimony, must go back to that which was from the beginning and endeavour to carry out what is written in God’s word.

Dedicating the walls

The second section of the chapter runs from verse 27 to verse 43, and describes the dedication of the completed walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah must have felt great relief and joy at seeing the crowds of rejoicing people arriving in Jerusalem for this great day. It was a day for people and leaders to reflect on how God had blessed the small band that had accompanied Zerubbabel and Joshua back to the uninhabited ruin of Jerusalem, how He had encouraged those first returnees into rebuilding the Temple and deflected the opposition of those opposed to it. Then they would also reflect on their personal experience of the good hand of God in the dangerous rebuilding of the walls that they had participated in. As the crowds around the walls viewed the completed structure with excitement, wonder and awe, they wanted to praise God who had done such great things for them (12:43).



In the time of the millennium the walls of Jerusalem will be called “salvation” and its gates “praise” (Isaiah 60:18). How often do we reflect on and rejoice in our salvation and lift up our voices in praise? Do we share with our fellow believers what the Lord has done, and what He is doing in our lives, and so give them, with ourselves, cause for joy and praise? If the walls of Jerusalem gave a sense of safety, and to enter into that place of security brought forth praise and thanksgiving in the day recorded for us in this chapter, we too should have a similar thrill as we reflect on the great salvation that has wrought by the Saviour for us. We often ask our brethren to pray for us in times of trouble, but mutual rejoicing in what the Lord does for us, in this apparent day of weakness, is equally needed. Too often we stare only at the blemishes of those we meet with, and fail to focus on the greatness of what the Lord has accomplished on our behalf.

Verse 30 tells us that “the priests and the Levites purified themselves, the people, the gates and the wall.” Everything and everybody was included in that act of purification. “The lesson this has for us is obvious. We may state it in a few words – No dedication without purification” (F.B.Hole). There has to be a spiritual purification of our lives in order that we may take our place as worshippers. David learned about the need for personal purification, and wrote of it in Psalms 51:2 and 119:9. Isaiah clearly states the same (1:16). In Romans

12:1 Paul emphasized the need for practical holy living, and in 2 Corinthians 7:1 for clean living. Thus, what was the responsibility of the priests and Levites in Nehemiah’s day is the responsibility every believer today. Thankfully we have been cleansed by the precious blood of Christ (1 John 1:7), and Isaiah 1:18 shows the dramatic change brought about by that cleansing power. But there also has to be that daily cleansing by the application of the word of God described in Ephesians 5:26 (“that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word”). And, in exhorting us to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,” Hebrews 10:22 adds “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” When this has taken place in our lives, and only then, we can offer the “reasonable service” of Romans 12:1.

Nehemiah gathers the princes and leaders of Israel on the wall and forms two companies to lead the praise (Nehemiah 12:31-43). What a scene of triumph! What a testimony there was to the surrounding peoples in the successful rebuild-



*No
dedication
without
purification*

ing and repairing of the walls and gates through the help of God, in spite of the enmity of Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, of adverse conditions and of the poor materials available! Never should we lose sight of the greatness, resources and power of our God (Ephesians 3:20-21). It is only through our lack of faith that we fail to avail ourselves of them.



*Is there that
sense of awe,
and an
appreciation
in our hearts
of the Lamb
of God?*



These two companies formed two choirs, one led by Ezra and the other by Nehemiah, which ascended the walls, one going to the right and the other to the left, and both arriving together at the house of God, the temple – the place of praise and worship. We can almost visualise the scene, the two choirs singing as they marched, the two groups, priests and Levites, answering one another in the manner of Psalms 24:7-10 and 136. Well might they fill the courts of the temple with the chorus, “Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” The song of praise was raised, and worship, in the form of “great sacrifices,” was offered throughout the day on the brazen altar in the midst of the temple court (v.43). What do these sacrifices teach us? It is not enough if we just stop at the singing and the excitement

this sometimes generates: what about the worship? Is there that sense of awe, and an appreciation in our hearts of the Lamb of God? Do His perfections thrill us as we think of who He is, what He has done and the wonder of the salvation that He accomplished for us at Calvary? Do we realise how much God the Father appreciates the Son and the work He has done? Do we realise the privilege that is ours in experiencing the nearness of being in the presence of the Saviour? It is when this occurs that worship from our redeemed hearts flows out to God. The hymn writer summed up the sense of worshipping hearts:

Gathered to Thy name, Lord Jesus,
Losing sight of all but Thee,
Oh, what joy Thy presence gives us,
Calling up our hearts to Thee!

Blood-bought, reconciled, forgiven,
Here Thy death we love to show,
Waiting till above in heaven,
All Thy glory we shall know.

Oh, the joy, the wondrous singing
When we see Thee as Thou art,
Thy blest name, Lord Jesus, bringing
Sweetest music to God's heart.

Notes of gladness, songs unceasing,
Hymns of everlasting praise,
Psalms of glory, joy increasing,
Through God's endless day of days.

“Doing good and communicating”

The remainder of the chapter (verses 44-47) describes how the people of that day arranged the upkeep and maintenance of the daily services in the temple. They also were concerned about the support of the priests, Levites, singers, and gatekeepers who kept the charge of their God by carrying out the tasks prescribed for the functioning of the daily temple worship.

The people made sure that there were provisions, and clean storehouses to receive the tithes, thus fulfilling the requirements of the Law of the LORD in giving portions for the priests and the Levites (see Numbers 18:8-32). We also have an obligation to meet the needs of those among us who seek to serve the Lord. Although Paul wrote that he knew how to be abased, our responsibility is to ensure that, wherever possible, the Lord's servants are provided for.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us of the twofold offering that we are to make: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:15-16). These two offerings should not be separated – thanksgiving going

up to God from grateful hearts, and generosity towards men and fellow believers in particular. This is the practical expression of our gratitude to God. We live in the day of the welfare state. The government appears to have taken out of our hands the opportunity to help the poor but if we look around there are still many ways of alleviating hardship. For instance, giving advice to those who need help in



*Do not
forget to do
good and to
share, for
with such
sacrifices
God is well
pleased*



a strange land: we live in a land where there are many immigrants and, sadly, in some places, the church is unaware of their needs. Nehemiah's people honoured God with the first-fruits of their substance, and we should do so too. We are reminded by Paul that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Malachi 3:10-12 clearly tells of what God



expects from His people, and what God does in return. We are stewards not only in spiritual matters but in material ones too. We are happy to sing the first lines of Frances Ridley Havergal's hymn,

“Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,”

but often have problems with the lines that ask,

“Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold...”



Let us always remember that all that we have has been given to us by the Lord and that we owe our all to the One who is the “Giver of all good.”

As stated at the beginning of this article, it appears that what is described in chapter 13:1-3 took place the same day. These verses introduce the subject of separation, which is

expanded in the remainder of the chapter. For now, it is sufficient to say that separation is the practical outcome of cleansing. No doubt, as chapter 13 is dealt with, practical examples of failure, as well as the exhortation to be vigilant, will be brought to the attention of the reader.

Stephen, Paul, and the Sidelining of Israel

Theo Balderston

What is the significance of Israel continuing to reject Christ after His ascension? Stephen's speech and martyrdom, followed by Paul's conversion, give the answer.

Israel condemned

At first glance Stephen's long speech in Acts 7 reads like a meander through the history of Israel. Closer examination of it reveals a focussed, spiritually powerful indictment of that nation. Peter and John had directly convicted the current Jewish generation, and especially its leadership, of the murder of Messiah (Acts 2:23; 3:13, 4:10). Stephen's speech went further: it showed that their crime did not distinguish this generation from all its ancestors, but rather brought to a head their long history of failure as the people of God.

Israel had always refused God's man, as Stephen exemplified from the treatment of Joseph and Moses. Joseph's brothers – here called “the patriarchs,” from whom they so proudly traced their tribal lineages – sold him as a slave into Egypt. And yet God used their wicked act to

secure the deliverance of “the seed of Abraham” from death in the ensuing famine (vv.9-14). Israelites also provoked the flight out of Egypt of the man – Moses – whom God had appointed for their deliverance. But God sent back the man they had rejected to become their deliverer (vv.17-36). Moses said that God would raise up a prophet like himself, whom they would hear. But they had not “heard” Moses even after their deliverance out of Egypt: rather, they wanted to go back to the very “furnace of affliction” from which they had been rescued. Moses' absence up the mountain was enough to make them substitute a golden calf for the awesome God of Sinai. As a consequence God gave them up to idolatry (vv.37-43).

The parallels drawn with Christ were unmistakable. Stephen's brief sketch of the life of Joseph told them that the Person they had crucified was their only hope of salvation from judgment. And, just as God had sent Moses back to rescue the enslaved Israelites, Christ had been “sent back,” risen from the dead, with salvation. As Moses' disappearance up the mountain made them reject both him and God, so Christ's ascension had made the Jewish leaders reject the wit-



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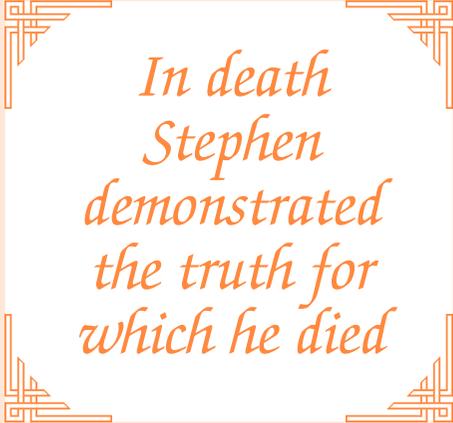
ness of the Holy Spirit to Him in the gospel.

This is where Stephen turned to meet the accusation that he spoke “blasphemous words against this holy place” (6:13). He emphasises the divine origin of the tabernacle. His remarks about the temple seem at first sight less positive, and even to support the accusation against him (vv.44-50). Yet Luke states definitely that the accusation was false (6:13). The quotation from Isaiah 66:1-2 needs closer scrutiny.

In fact it is a clear echo of Solomon’s own prayer of dedication (1 Kings 8:27). Moreover the beginning of Isaiah 66 cannot be condemning the temple as such, when the end of the chapter refers to the temple as “the house of the LORD” (Isaiah 66: 20). Rather, the LORD stated in vv.1-2 that the temple was not something that its custodians could claim as a “good work” of theirs, for He made all things, including the temple, and it belonged to Him. But when the mass of Israel was godless, their temple services were no better than idolatry (vv.3-4). And since God dwells in heaven, control of the temple gave no monopoly of access to Him. He was also free to dwell with His afflicted remnant, whom the temple hierarchy scorned (v.5), but who were contrite about their personal and national sins and who trembled at the prophecies of judgment. This gives the key to Stephen’s condemnation. For those who rejected Messiah risen and ascended, their temple-worship became like Israel’s idolatry while Moses was up the mountain or like the worship of the

unbelieving mass of Israel as condemned in Isaiah 66. Contrariwise, those who repent and follow Christ ascended have access to God through Christ in glory (as Stephen’s vision then immediately demonstrated). The council’s violent reaction to his vision (7:57) confirms that this was the point at issue concerning the temple. However Stephen’s words did not repudiate the temple for Jews who believed in Messiah (Acts 6:13).

Stephen’s point was also that their refusal of the Holy Spirit’s testimony *after* the Lord’s ascension further exemplified the whole, sad, history of their nation; it mirrored their fathers’ refusal of the prophets’ testimony to Christ *before* He came (vv.51-2). And what about their charge that Stephen spoke “blasphemous words against the law?” (6:13). Who were *they* to accuse? They and their fathers had “received the law by direction of angels and [had] not kept it” (v.53). It was if to say, in that cutting modern phrase, that Israel throughout its history had been “a waste



*In death
Stephen
demonstrated
the truth for
which he died*

of space.” They had been given the greatest advantage, the greatest privilege, ever given to man before Christ, in being given the very “oracles of God,” and they had wasted it. Small wonder that “they gnashed at him with their teeth!”

The Son of Man standing

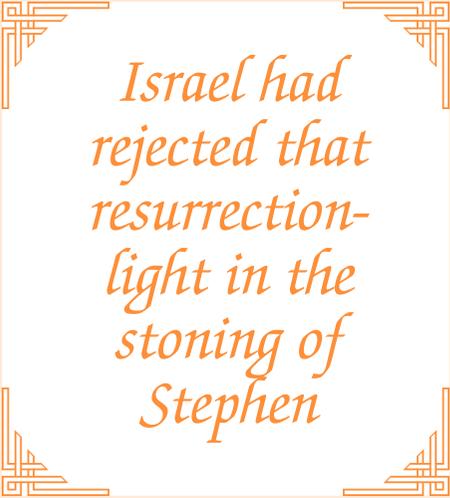
But it was not for exposing this that they killed him, but rather for his sight of Christ in heaven. In death Stephen demonstrated the truth for which he died. The scorned followers of Messiah did have access to heaven. The heavens are opened to him, and Stephen reports that he sees “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” On the principle of “interpreting Scripture by Scripture” the nearest parallel to this sight of Christ *standing* is Daniel 7:13. Stephen was permitted a view of the Son of Man standing by the throne of God to receive the kingdom in order to return in the power of it. As with our Lord’s own words to the same council not long before (Luke 22:66-69; cp. Matthew 26:64), Stephen’s vision implied the divine condemnation of his listeners and the Israel they represented that refused Christ. Did it make them repent? Not at all: they stoned Stephen. There is a clear parallel with the Lord’s parable of the nobleman who “went to a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.” Like the citizens of the parable, the Sanhedrin dispatched Stephen to heaven after his Lord with an unmistakable message: “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:12, 14).

*We will not
have
this man to
reign over us*

Why Israel was sidelined

But God turned their refusal of Christ glorified into grace. The fanatical colleague who minded their outer clothes as they hurried to stone Stephen would shortly be also struck down, not in judgment, but by the brightness of a light from heaven (Acts 9:3-4). This “light” was of supreme importance for the ministry of Paul. He connected it to Christ being “a light to the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; Acts 13:47; 26:13, 18, 23). Christ became this “light” in resurrection, as Paul explained to Agrippa. Acts 26:23 should read, “... and how that he first by resurrection of the dead should proclaim light to the people and to the Gentiles” (R.V. [1881]). Against the background of these two texts from Isaiah, Jews and their sympathisers should have understood how the light from heaven that arrested him on the Damascus road commissioned him to preach to the Gentiles.

But Israel had rejected that resurrection-light in the stoning of Stephen. It is remarkable that Paul first quotes Isaiah



*Israel had
rejected that
resurrection-
light in the
stoning of
Stephen*

49:6 in Acts 13:47 after the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia had refused the gospel. He had been commissioned to preach to Jews also (Acts 26:17, 20), but the Lord subsequently told him that they would refuse his testimony (Acts 22:18). Paul certainly did not accept this Jewish refusal passively; on the contrary, his whole mission to the end of Acts was “to the Jew first” (Acts 26:20; Romans 1:16). But, as he thought over his missionary labours on the eve of the trip to Jerusalem which terminated them, he had to conclude that in every place where there was a Jewish community, it had refused the gospel, which had then gone out the Gentiles against their opposition (Romans 9:1-4).

But Paul also reflected that it had been necessary that they should be enemies as regards the gospel *for the sake of the Gentiles* (11:28). Why so? Why could their national repentance after the resurrection not have *better* served the spread of the gospel than their opposition?

Paul wrote that they had to be enemies. The only reason why they were enemies *for the sake of the Gentiles* must that if Israel had believed, *either* Israel would have had to be the centre of the saving ways of God in the world, with the Gentiles on the outer fringes, as depicted in the OT, *or* Israel’s special place in the heart of God would have disappeared for ever. In the first case *the church*, composed of “neither Jew nor Greek” (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11) could not have been introduced; in the second (as many teach) God would have to have backtracked on His special promises to Israel. We might think of the promises concerning the “land of promise”, deliverance from their enemies, and headship of the nations (Genesis 13:15; Deuteronomy 28:13; 1 Chronicles 16:35; Luke 1:73-4, 24:21,25-6; Acts 1:6-7, 7:3-5).

That the gospel necessitated the sidelining of Israel for a time was also implied by the Lord Himself just before His ascension. On the very day of resurrection, He had commissioned the apostles to preach to the Gentiles, promising them the power of the Holy Spirit for this task (Luke 24:47-9; Acts 1:4). However His commission had raised an entirely understandable question in their minds. “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) In the Old Testament the gift of the Spirit is associated with Israel’s restoration, and the blessing of the Gentiles is in conjunction with this restoration (Isaiah 11:10-11; 59:15 - 60:16; 66:15-20; Ezekiel 36:24-27; Joel 2: 18-20,

28-32; Zechariah 8:13;14:12-16). The Lord's reply *accepts* that the kingdom *will be restored* to Israel but not the apostles' inference from the Old Testament that this must first begin to happen *before* the blessing of the Gentiles. The "times and seasons" of Israel's blessing were not their business; their business was witnessing to Christ from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8). The Gentile mission had to precede the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.

Man condemned; Man glorified

Stephen's indictment of Israel also implied the deeper reason why Israel must wait, as was afterwards developed in Paul's letter to the Romans. No-one could doubt that Gentiles were far from God, "dead in trespasses and sins." Stephen's address additionally spelt out that *Jews* were far from God – and not just the current leaders or the current generation, but Israel throughout its entire history; and that their constant rejection of God, His law, and His man had reached an issue in the crucifixion of Christ. Therefore the state of humanity was shown in *Jews*, the best of men, to be just as it had been shown at the Flood. But Christ had risen. Believing Jews and Gentiles, irrevocably condemned in *all* that they were until they were saved – i.e. as regards the nature that they received in Adam – were to be incorporated into Christ *risen*, share His heavenly life and return with Him in glory. Spelling this out was Paul's ministry.

Only after Stephen's address had stated what the cross of Christ signalled about

Israel was it time for Philip to visit Samaria and preach to the eunuch (Acts 8), for Peter to have the thrice-repeated vision that took him to Cornelius (Acts 10), and for Paul to become the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13).

Stephen's indictment of Israel was not just a dry theorem to Paul. He had to learn it in himself. "I through the law died to the law, that I might live unto God" (Galatians 2:19). What that entailed we variously glimpse in Romans 7:9-24 and Philippians 3:4-8. And so must we – first by faith (Romans 6:3-4), but usually then also by bitter experience. Paul no longer had a life of his

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*This glory
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or her up to
Christ in glory*

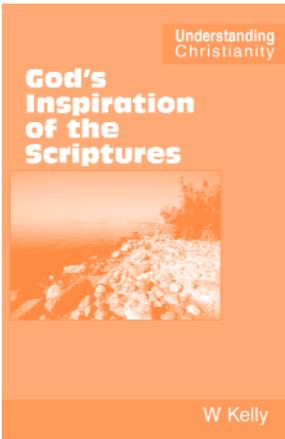
own worth the name, but God had another Man, Christ; and Christ risen now lived in Paul. This was a fact, but how did Paul practically experience it? By faith: "Christ living in me" was a life of relationship with a Person "who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). A remarkable instance of the effect of this on Paul was that in Acts 13:47 he actually applies Isaiah 49:6 to himself and Barnabas.

The light that shone from heaven had another implication for Paul: it drew him *to* heaven. It filled the gospel message with "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). This glory transformed the beholder and drew him or her up to Christ in glory (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:17-18). The OT Scriptures foresaw the believing Gentiles being assembled to Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3; 66:19-20; Joel 2:32; Zechariah 8:8,20-23). Paul's ministry contains nothing of this but always has in view their being saved for *heaven*.

(Romans 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:1-6; Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 1:5). This "upward call" means that even in this world their life takes its character from heaven (Philippians 3:14, 20-21).

And yet God is not finished with Israel (Acts 1:7). Were the promises of "the God of glory" to Abraham rescinded? When God had given Israel up in the wilderness, had it been *for ever*? (cp. Acts 7:2-4, 42). This brings us back to the two sights of Christ glorified. Paul's drew him up to where Christ is now (Colossians 3:1). Stephen's showed Christ on the point of returning to earth. The fulfilment of Stephen's has been delayed by the long gospel era. But the time will come when Israel nationally will in effect accept Stephen's indictment (Zechariah 12:10-13). It has to come, among other reasons, "for the truth of God," that is, the faithfulness of God to His promises (Romans 15:8; cp. 11:29). But also for the many-sided glory of Christ as the true Adam in whom Eden is restored, the true David who is Head of the nations, the true Israel who brings Israel back to God (Psalm 8; 18:43-45; Isaiah 11:1-9; 49:3-6). *All* that was lost in sinning man is more than made good in Christ.

*Yet God is
not finished
with Israel*



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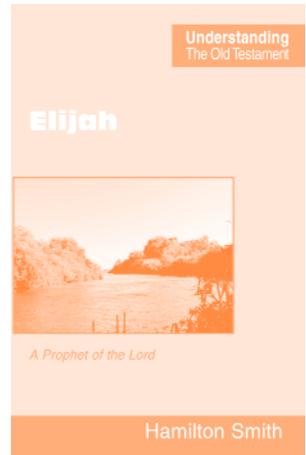
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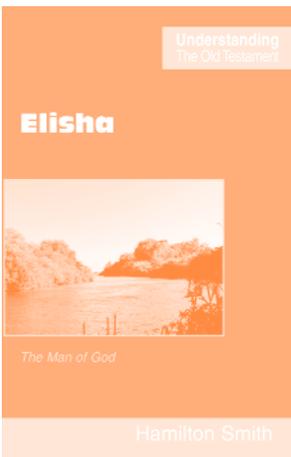


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Much more than this

2 Chronicles 25:6-15, which see.

“God is able to give you much more than this;”
but beware lest you trust in idolatries.
All affliction for Christ
finds grace, present, unpriced,
and far greater a weight of eternal bliss.