



Scripture Truth

Points to Ponder

What Does the Bible Say About...Forgiveness?

Lessons from Ezra

Jesus' Farewell Words

Eternal Life

The Two Seeds

January – March 2003

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Gordon Hughes

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

Annual Subscription 2003
£9.00 Post Free UK – £11.00 Post Free Overseas

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front cover photograph of swans on the River Coln at Bibury, Gloucestershire

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

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Points to Ponder

These three extracts were sent in by readers who had come across them in their private reading and who felt that they were deserving of a wider audience. If the Lord has blessed you in your private reading, why not share it with us? We would love to hear from you.

To love aright

“Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Ephesians 4:13).

To have constant close association with people whose interpretation of Scripture does not tally with ours is hard for the flesh, but good for the spirit. We may have right views, but God is giving us an opportunity to display a right attitude; we may believe aright, but He is testing us to see if we love aright. It is easy to have a mind well stored with sound scriptural teaching, yet a heart devoid of true love. Oh, for Christian tolerance! Oh, for largeness of heart! Alas! That many of God’s children are so zealous for the light they have that they immediately label as outsiders, and treat as such, all whose interpretation of Scripture differs from theirs. God would have us walk in love towards all who hold views contrary to those so dear to us. Nothing so tests the spirituality of a teacher as opposition to his teaching.

(Source unknown)

A challenge for 2003

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:13,14).

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy it less.

We have bigger houses, but smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees, but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often.

We have learned how to make a living, but not a life; we’ve added years to our life, but not life to our years.

We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbour. We've conquered outer space, but not inner space; we've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul; we've split the atom, but not our prejudice.

We have higher incomes, but lower morals; we've become long on quantity, but short on quality.

These are times of tall men, and short character; steep profits and shallow relationships. These are times of world peace, but domestic warfare; more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition. These are days of two incomes, but more divorce; fancier houses, but broken homes.

It is a time when there is much in the show window, but nothing in the stock-room; a time when technology can bring this letter to you, and a time when you can choose either to make a difference...or just hit delete.

(These words were penned by a student at Columbine High School, U.S.A. shortly after the mass murders there.)

Something to remember

"...by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4).

Some time ago, a friend of mine punished his three-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Money was tight, and he became infuriated when the child tried to decorate a box to put under the tree. Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, "This is for you, Daddy." He was embarrassed by his earlier over-reaction, but his anger flared again when he found that the box was empty.

He yelled at her, "Don't you know that when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside it?" The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, "Oh, Daddy, it's not empty. I blew kisses into the box. All for you, Daddy."

The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl, and he begged her forgiveness. My friend told me that he kept that gold box by his bed for years. Whenever he was discouraged, he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there.

In a very real sense, in God's word each of us has been given a gold container filled with unconditional love and kisses. There is no more precious possession anyone can hold.

(Source unknown)

What Does the Bible Say About...?

3. Forgiveness

John Keable

"But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4). "Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" (Matthew 18:33).

Forgiveness is at the very heart of Christianity. If God had chosen not to forgive sinners, we would all be destined for an eternity of torment. Thankfully, God is merciful; He has provided a full and free pardon to all who will call upon Him. Sometimes, we take His forgiveness for granted. It will be helpful, then, to take a fresh look at this subject and the response which God expects from us.

Our forgiving God

Our God is a forgiving God! He does not have to be; He would have been quite justified in sending us all to hell for eternity. That is what we deserve, and that is where we must begin our consideration of this subject. We belong to God by right; He created us for His own good pleasure and as part of His wonderful creation (Genesis chs.1,2). Sadly, we as a race rebelled against Him (Genesis 3). We have been in rebellion ever since. Nehemiah 9:17 sums up the situation: "They refused to listen, and did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among

them...but You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness; You did not forsake them."

Throughout the Old Testament, we read of examples of God's loving kindness. His people rebelled against Him time after time; and time after time God forgave them. King David writes, "You, LORD, are good and ready to forgive, abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon You" (Psalm 86:5). Later in the Psalms, we read, "O LORD our God, You answered them. You were a forgiving God to them" (99:8).

The New Testament gives us the greatest example of God's forgiveness. There we read of His great plan of salvation and forgiveness. When there was nothing in us to respond to God's great love, He took the initiative by sending His only begotten Son into the world to die for us and so make it possible for God to offer forgiveness to all. Paul testifies to this: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15); "And

when you were dead in the transgressions and uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions” (Colossians 2:13).

Understanding the forgiveness of God is the first and most basic step to becoming a Christian. When speaking to the Roman soldier, Cornelius, Peter could say, “Of Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43). Moreover, Paul, preaching before King Agrippa, declared that God had sent him “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light...in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 12:18).

Forgiveness through blood

From the day man first sinned, blood has been instrumental in forgiveness. In Genesis 3:21, we read how God made garments of skin for Adam and Eve. Blood is not directly mentioned here, but it is obvious that an animal had to die to provide those skins. In the next chapter, Abel, Adam’s son, sacrificed a lamb, which God accepted on his behalf. Again, there is no direct mention of blood here but Genesis 9:4,5 teaches us that blood is the essence of life. Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground was not acceptable.

In Exodus 12, we read the story of the Passover. An angel was to pass

through Egypt killing the oldest child in every family. God’s people were to kill a lamb and smear its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their homes. When God saw the blood, the angel would pass over that house, sparing the life of the firstborn.

Throughout the Old Testament, lambs, goats, bulls, cows and birds were slaughtered before God, their blood being poured out beside the altar as a sacrifice for sin. Once a year, the High Priest was to go into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood before the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the Jewish nation and so obtain forgiveness. In Hebrews 9:22, we read, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

The blood of those animals, however, only had value in one respect: they looked forward to the time when God’s own Son would pour out His precious blood upon the cross. Writing of this great event, Paul declares, “In Him (Jesus) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Peter writes similarly, “You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold...but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19).

During the breaking of bread (or holy communion as some call it), we remember the Lord’s sacrifice for us.

We break the bread as a symbol of His body given for us. Then we take a cup of wine, of which the Lord Himself said, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

We see, then, that the blood of Jesus poured out upon the cross is vital for the forgiveness of our sins. “The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Confession and repentance

We have seen that the shedding of the blood of Christ is vital to allowing God to offer forgiveness. Confession and repentance are vital in our receiving that forgiveness. At the beginning of Mark’s Gospel, John the Baptist preached “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (1:4). At the end of Luke’s Gospel, the Lord instructed His followers “that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations” (24:47).

Repentance is a word little used today. Simply put, it means to turn around and travel in the opposite direction. When we preach repentance, we are challenging our hearers to make a radical change in their lives – leaving behind their former life of sin and beginning a new life in the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Paul said to the people of Athens, “God now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Only by repent-

ing of our sins can we gain forgiveness. Confession, too, plays a vital part in receiving and enjoying God’s forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

When the Lord Jesus died upon the cross, He paid the penalty for every single sin we *have* committed and every sin we *will* commit. Being a Christian does not make us perfect; it does give us a new life and a special relationship with God. However, for as long as we are human, we will still be imperfect and capable of sin. When we become conscious of the fact that we have sinned, we must confess the fact to God. Un-confessed sin forms a barrier between God and us. The penalty has already been paid, but to have full enjoyment of our relationship with God, confession and repentance are constant requirements on our part.

The unforgivable sin

Many Christians are worried and confused by the mention of ‘the unforgivable sin’. It is something which is mentioned in all but one of the Gospels, so it must be important: “I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in

this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31,32); “I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin” (Mark 3:28,29); “Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven” (Luke 12:10).

However you look at it, these are very strong words. I know Christians who live in fear that they may have, or may yet, commit this dreadful sin. My response is, “The fact that you are a Christian means you haven’t and you won’t!” Why am I so sure? Because Jesus was speaking to people who believed He was evil. Not only that, they were attributing His power to the devil. They were saying, in effect, that the Holy Spirit’s power came from the devil. This is the blasphemy. Someone who truly believes that the Holy Spirit is evil will never be brought by Him to the Lord for salvation. That sin, therefore, is unforgivable.

As an aside, you may have noticed that while the names ‘God’, ‘Jesus’ and ‘Christ’ are often heard used as swear words, I have never heard anyone use the name of the Holy Spirit in such a way. No doubt, this is a further demonstration of God’s wonderful grace!

Forgiving others

The fact that we have received forgiveness from God puts upon us a responsibility to share that forgiveness with others. We are happy enough to preach forgiveness from the platform, offering God’s forgiveness to all who will turn to Him. How ready are we to forgive those who sin against us? If we harbour un-forgiveness in our hearts against other people, we will never fully appreciate God’s great forgiveness to us (see Matthew 6:12-15).

Writing to the Ephesian Christians, Paul instructed them, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (4:32). When we become truly conscious of how much God has forgiven us, can we refuse to forgive?

Jesus told a story of two men. One owed several thousand pounds and was forgiven his debt. But that same man found another who owed him just a few pounds and refused to let him off his debt (Matthew 18:21-35). The debtor who refused to forgive was thrown into prison. Jesus used the story to teach us that, no matter how badly we may be treated by other people, we will never suffer as much as He did. Yet, as the nails were being driven into His hands, Jesus was heard to say, “Father, forgive them...” (Luke 23:34).

A Son Is Given

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Around the birthplace of this King
No guarding sentries stand;
No courtiers throng this Prince to see,
But shepherds, crook in hand.
No trumpet peals from palace towers,
Yet hosts of angels sing;
Wise men, beholding His bright star,
Follow, and seek the King.
Hear, all you despots proud and great,
Holding your transient sway,
This warrior shall a Kingdom gain
Never to pass away;
No bound, no limit shall confine
His government’s increase:
A Child is born, a Son is given –
Behold, the Prince of Peace!

*(from Immanuel, Reflections on the Incarnation, by Hazel Dixon
Obtainable from Scripture Truth Publications).*

Readers Write In

P.28 of the October issue of Scripture Truth carries the statement: “No fault is recorded of Joseph and, as such, he is a beautiful type of Christ.” A reader comments, “Read Genesis 48:10-22. Joseph tried to correct his father’s choice (vv.18,19). Surely this was a fault of Joseph? No one type of Christ is perfect.”

Joseph’s action certainly indicates a lack of spiritual awareness. This might well be a fault on Joseph’s part though it might also be regarded as a normal part of one’s spiritual education. It still remains true that, in the general details of his life, Joseph more closely mirrors the Lord than any other Bible character. That only Christ is perfect is, of course, absolutely right. (Ed.)

We welcome comments from interested readers.

Lessons from Ezra

Part 3

Ted Murray

“God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.” These words have brought their special assurance to Christians since they were first penned by William Cowper more than 200 years ago. See how the truth of these words was worked out in the lives of God’s people about 2,500 years ago.

The reawakening (ch.5)

Time to start again

Some fifteen years have passed since the events of ch.4. Nothing appears to be happening but, behind the scenes, God is working! God has two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, in the background and, at the right time, they are used of God to stir up the people. The people were in the right position, but not in the right condition. They were in the right place, Jerusalem, that the Lord would have them, but their condition was such that they had stopped the rebuilding work on the temple.

As time passes, we, too, are apt to let some things slip. Our fervour wanes, our desire for the Lord’s testimony diminishes and, as a consequence, we become dismayed and discouraged. God’s word had started the work (Ezra 1:1), and only God’s word would continue it (Galatians 3:3). When the Lord wants something doing, He gives instructions through His word. Because of our unbelief, we do not see the power of His word.

We allow our human reasoning to influence our belief and, consequently, we miss out on the blessing.

God always has the remedy. His two prophets bring His word to the people. Their message was in the form of the stick and the carrot. Haggai first rebukes, then instructs and, finally, encourages. Zechariah first of all encourages but then speaks of future events. These two prophets were used of God to tell forth, and to foretell, His message to the remnant in Jerusalem. The result of this was that the decree of the pagan king, Artaxerxes, was set aside and the people bowed to the power of God’s declared word. The people heard the word, obeyed the word, and so found their fear and dismay banished. They were prepared to do not only the physical work required but they also were not ashamed to declare to those opposing them the names of those who were involved in the rebuilding. Are we, in our day, prepared to be identified as, and associated with, those who follow God’s Christ?

The messages of Haggai and Zechariah

The prophetic messages given were accepted by the elders who, in turn, instructed the people to restart the work of rebuilding the house of God (v.2). Haggai gives four messages over a period of four months (see Haggai 1:1; 2:1,10,20). The first message, a rebuke, took almost a month to have an effect. No one likes to be rebuked, but here we see the working of God in the conscience of the people. We, too, have to admit that it often takes time for the word of God to have its effect on us. Like the remnant, we tend to pay more attention to our domestic affairs than to the testimony of God. Haggai’s second message is one of encouragement: “Be strong” (2:4). His next message is one of instruction on how to live a clean life, a life separate from defilement (see 1 John 2:15). His final message was one of promise, looking forward to the day when the Davidic covenant would be fulfilled. That day, when the Lord will reign as King of kings, is yet to come.

While Haggai’s ministry focussed largely on practical issues, Zechariah’s ministry focussed on Jerusalem which is mentioned over 40 times in the book. Its key statement is, “I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy” (1:14). The book’s 14 chapters cover 8 visions (chs.1-6), fasting and tradi-

tions, (chs.7-8), and two ‘burdens’ or deeply felt messages from God (chs.9-14). The preaching of God’s word had its effect – the people were encouraged, invigorated, and restarted the work.

We see something of God’s grace and His care in v.5 of our chapter: “The eye of their God was upon...them”. Surely we should take heart in our day that that same eye of our God, which is even upon the sparrow (Luke 12:6), is upon us also. If we would realise that God is for us (Romans 8:31), then nothing would deter us from being fully committed to the testimony of the Lord.

The enemy at work

Another adversary is now brought into the picture (v.3). Although time passes, and people come and go from the scene, the attack never ceases. The implication from v.8 is that Tattenai and his companion, Shethar-Bozenai, came across the re-building by chance. We must realise that, by contrast, the one who is our enemy, the prince and power of the air, is fully aware of our every action and will do his utmost, either personally or through his agents, to hinder any work for God in which we are engaged.

It is interesting to note that the enemy does not use false evidence concerning the re-building of the city: “the work goes on and prospers in their hands”. Even the accuser of the

brethren cannot deny the facts! When the work of the Lord proceeds and souls are won for Him, worship pours forth from grateful hearts. Even Satan cannot deny that which is for the Lord's glory and honour. The remnant's fearless testimony is recorded: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth" (v.11). Although Israel's failure, and God's judgment upon them, are recorded, this no longer affected their work for the Lord. On the contrary, the effect of God's word through His messengers enabled the remnant to carry on. Let us take heed to the word of the Lord in our day and strengthen the things that remain.

The people's confidence

It is noticeable that, when challenged, the people gave their answer in a two-fold way: they spoke of being servants of God and also of being servants, in a political sense, of the king (v.13). There may be a lesson for us in our day that we should be aware of what is available to us, as Christians, from governments of the day and should utilise these benefits to the full. F.B.Hole writes, "This Darius, of the ancient line, was inclined to reverse the edicts of the usurper, Artaxerxes. On checking the records, he found the truth of the matter and, as requested, sent his pleasure."

The psalmist reminds us that God's truth will be our shield and buckler (Psalm 91:4). John 8:32 reminds us

*God will never fail
faith in Him*

that the truth will make us free. Here we see the application of these wonderful scriptures and, in the next chapter, we see the outcome of the search, instigated by the opposition and commissioned by Darius, resulting in the benefit of God's people. God will never fail faith in Him. He does, and will continue, to make bare His arm on behalf of those who acknowledge the authority of His word (Isaiah 52:10). Here God causes the wrath of men to praise Him and to fulfil His word (Psalm 76:10).

The building finished (ch.6)

God's answer

When the original decree was found and checked, it was found to be more favourable to the Jews than to their adversaries! Vv.1-5 detail the search for, and the location of, Cyrus's scroll and also the king's command, "Let the House be re-built!" We also find the purpose of the building, how the building should be done, together with the materials which had to be provided. What a relief it must have been to the remnant of that day when Darius's reply was received! What a triumph of God's grace towards His faithful people who had not ceased working but had stated that they

would await the answer of the king. Their faith had been tested throughout the considerable time which would have elapsed before the reply was received.

There are times in our lives when we have to wait for God's answer. When it comes, we may be full of praise and worship to the One who is the Spring and Source of our blessing, even when that answer is not always the one we expect! What a shock for Tattenai and his companions! Not only were they forbidden to hinder the work, but they had to provide for it! The lines from the hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform", certainly sum up the situation here. We might take courage as we ponder these scriptures and note that, when everything seems hopeless, God's mighty hand is revealed. What an outcome we have here! Not only were the adversaries to assist in the provision of the materials needed, they would also suffer the consequences if they disobeyed the king's command.

In vv.7-22, we see how God deals with His people through circumstances. In v.7, there is the command to "let...alone", God's protecting hand. In v.8, "Let the cost be paid immediately", God's providing hand. In v.9, "Whatever is needed for worship, give daily without fail", God's bountiful hand. In v.10, "that they may offer", God's sustaining hand.

Finally, in vv.11,12, "I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word...", God's hand of judgment. We see the hand of God's judgment, in fulfilment of Darius's curse, in what happened to Antiochus who defiled the temple and died. The Romans, too, who utterly destroyed the temple, have gone, their empire but a memory. God is not mocked. His word will not return to Him void "but shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

God's message

What a relief for the people of that day when they not only heard the outcome of the letters, but saw the results! Tattenai and his associates promptly obeyed the command of Darius. As the elders of the Jews built, they prospered from the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah (v.14). This is the second time that these two men have been mentioned. Lessons have already been drawn from their ministry, as we saw in the previous chapter. There is further instruction here.

In v.14, the title 'prophet' is only given to Haggai. To our way of thinking, Zechariah would more readily merit the title, as it is he who unfolds future events. We have to realise that a prophet is one who declares God's message from heaven to men on earth, whatever the character of that message. "He that prophesieth

speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3). This is exactly what Haggai did. He reminded, cajoled, encouraged, and motivated the people by his ministry. He was God’s messenger for the moment. Zechariah’s message was equally important giving hope for the future of Israel.

Today, we are more likely to enjoy a message similar to that of Zechariah than that of Haggai. No one likes being told what to do; we are far happier considering future events and other doctrinal matters than doing the work of the present. Today, we need to heed the call to restart the work of evangelisation. The hymn writer reminds us that, although the foundation is laid on the Living Stone, the fabric of the building is a continuous process.

View the vast building, see it rise;
The work how great, the plan how wise!
Oh, wondrous fabric, power unknown,
That rears it on the “Living Stone”!

It is our task today to realise that there is work to do on building the church. We are the labourers and skilled workers whom God wants to use and will use if we are prepared to work for Him.

Finished at last!

So the work was finished (v.15). It had taken a long time, some twenty years or more to complete. Surely this is a message of encouragement that,

despite the barren years, the work was finished. Let us take hold of the fact that God’s great work, which is according to His wise plan, will be carried out. It is our privilege to be part of His workforce today. We can share in the joy of being used of God to carry out His plan. So the people celebrated the dedication of the temple with joy (v.16). They rejoiced and offered sacrifices at the dedication, but they also remembered their failings. As well as the animals offered as a peace offering, we find that they offered 12 goats as a sin offering for all Israel. The remnant in Jerusalem were mindful of the whole nation. In the days of breakdown in which we live, we should be mindful of the whole Church of God, not just the few with whom we fellowship on a regular basis.

At the end of v.18, we are reminded that they were obedient to the written word. The phrase “as it is written” is a timely reminder to us today. If we accepted God’s word at its face value, instead of looking for other opinions, there would be less controversy amongst the people of God. It would also safeguard us from the wiles of Satan. When the Lord was tempted in the wilderness, He used the written word to repel Satan’s assault.

Holy unto the Lord

We need to be able not just to quote chapter and verse, but to be governed by, and to live according to, the living

word of God. When the remnant celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, we see a people governed by, and living according to, God’s word (v.19). In vv.20,21, the priests, the Levites, the remnant, and others who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations joined in this time of revival and blessing. The priests and the Levites purified themselves in order that they could slaughter the Passover lamb for the separated company.

The Passover to the Jew corresponds to the Lord’s Supper to the Christian. Both speak of the death of Christ. The Passover reminded the Jews of their deliverance by God from the yoke of Egypt. The Lord’s death reminds the Church of the price paid for its redemption. Today, in this dispensation of grace, this principle of personal purification applies to all believers when they come to remember the Lord in His death. Paul reminds us that each one must examine himself and so partake of the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

In the company portrayed in our chapter, there is a corporate cleanliness; they were all pure. Today, whilst each believer is positionally cleansed from sin through faith in the finished work of Christ, the day to day defilement in each of our lives must be dealt with. Those who gather together to remember the Lord in His death must be both holy and pure. At the

beginning of the church’s history, all who called upon the name of the Lord had a place at His table. As time passed, it became necessary to issue instructions that a person living a wicked life was not to partake of the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 5). Teachers of false doctrine were also to be identified by the church and denied fellowship (2 John 10). These principles still apply. All who eat unworthily are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27). But we should always remember that it is the Lord’s Table, not ours.

In v.22, we read that all those who had separated themselves from the filthiness of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord, kept the feast with joy. They had reason to be joyful. They had separated themselves unto the Lord; they had found favour with the king; they could work without fear; their hands had been strengthened. We, too, can enjoy a similar experience to those of Zerubbabel’s day when we are in the good of what God has done for us (1 Peter 2:9). Let us rejoice, even in our day, that the Lord ever watches and cares for His own!

*It is our privilege
to be part of
His workforce today*

Jesus' Farewell Words

Part 6. John 17:1-26

Cor Bruins

It is surely a tremendous privilege that we are able to listen to the outpourings of the heart of the Lord Jesus to His Father just before the cross. We are indeed on holy ground! This is the final article in a series of talks originally broadcast on London Premier Radio's 'Truth for Today' series.

Jesus' last words

The last words and will of someone we love are very precious and important. In John 17, we have the last words and will of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here Jesus is praying aloud to His Father in the presence of His dear friends, the disciples. In this way, they would know just how much He cared for them. He would make provision for their future by asking the Father to take care of them. At the close of Jesus' ministry, we read that He "departed, and did hide Himself from them" (John 12:36). However, in chapters 13-17 we find the Lord in most happy fellowship with His disciples, revealing to them the wonderful place which they had in His love, and how that love would be continually exercised on their behalf now that He was about to leave them and go to the Father.

His public ministry was now over. He was on the eve of giving His life a ransom for these disciples, and for us. This would be followed by His taking His place in heaven at His Father's right hand. It would, therefore, be nat-

ural for His disciples to conclude that His ministry unto them was also ended. But not so! His ministry would continue. That is what this beautiful and instructive section of this Gospel is primarily designed to show us. In heaven, He is still occupied with the interests of His people.

This prayer of the Lord Jesus is a wonderful example of the communications which constantly passed between the Son and His Father while He was on earth. The Son opens His heart to His Father. Why did Jesus pray this prayer? So that later His disciples would remember what He had said and be much encouraged. He prayed for their security, for their sanctity, for their unity, and for their ministry of sharing the Gospel with a lost world. This 'High Priestly prayer', as it is often called, shows what the Lord Jesus desires for Himself, what a wonderful place the disciples had in His affections, and shows that they, and we, might be assured that all His influence with the Father would be employed for their, and our, advantage. In this chapter,

the veil is drawn aside and we are admitted with our Great High Priest into the holiest of all. Here we approach the secret place of the tabernacle of the Most High (Psalm 91:1). We should, therefore, as it were, put off our shoes from off our feet, listening with humble and reverent hearts, for the place wherein we now stand is indeed holy ground.

It will help to look at this chapter as follows:

1. vv.1-5: Christ and His Father, making request for Himself – discussing His work.
2. vv.6-19: Christ making request for His disciples – focussing on God's word.
3. vv.20-26: Christ making request for all believers – focussing on man's world.

Jesus makes request for Himself (vv.1-5)

The great theme of these verses is that He had finished the work which His Father had sent Him to do. In this Gospel, the verb 'to send' occurs some 40 times. In v.1, the Lord Jesus 'lifts up' His eyes to heaven. Several times in the Gospels, we see Him looking up to heaven: when He blessed and broke the five loaves to feed the 5,000; as He stood at the grave of Lazarus. He always turned to His Father in the complete confidence of being heard and answered.

God was, indeed, His Father in a threefold way:

1. As to His human nature, He was miraculously conceived. Not Joseph, the husband of Mary, was His Father, but God, who had prepared Him a body (Hebrews 10:5). The angel Gabriel had said to Mary, "the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).
2. God stands in relation of Father to Jesus Christ as the Head and Representative of the holy family redeemed from among men. God said, "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son" (Hebrews 1:5).
3. The appellation 'Father' refers to that essential relationship which subsisted between the first and second Persons of the Godhead from all eternity. Identity of nature is the chief idea suggested by this term.

When Jesus said 'Father', He expressed this relationship of Sonship. This was, in fact, the first of seven pleas to be heard in this chapter:

- because of His filial relationship to God (v.1);
- because the appointed hour had arrived (v.1);
- because authority over all flesh had been given to Him (v.2);
- because He would give eternal life to God's elect (v.2);
- because, in bestowing eternal life, He would bring them to know the Father (v.3);
- because He had glorified the Father on earth (v.4);

because He had finished the work which had been given Him to do (v.4). 'Father' also speaks of affection, confidence, and submission. Remember that Jesus Christ speaks here as a real Man on earth. God had a definite plan, and a definite 'timetable' for the work He sent His Son to do. At least seven times, the Lord Jesus refers to the 'hour' (beginning at 2:4). Here we come to the last mention of the momentous 'hour' of eternal issues. Jesus had lived on a 'divine timetable' while on earth. "My times are in Thy hand" (Psalm 31:15). God also has a timetable for each one of us. Nothing happens to us that He does not know and that He does not allow.

The moment had come when Jesus, the eternal, holy Son of God would be made sin for us. Jesus knew that this was the moment when His request would be granted. His request that the Father glorify Him was granted in His resurrection, ascension and mediatorial work, and in giving to Jesus *all* authority in heaven and on earth!

A better word for Jesus' 'praying' in this chapter would be 'requesting'. Jesus' praying is not exactly like our praying. When we pray, it is a supplication of an inferior to a superior – God. Jesus was God and equal to God. Yet He would exert no power in His own right. He was true to the place into which He was pleased to come, and as a Man receives authority from the Father. He has authority to

give eternal life to whom He will. Jesus says, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son". The word 'glory' or 'glorify' is used eight times in this prayer, so it is an important theme.

We must carefully distinguish the various glories which Jesus mentions. In v.5, He refers to His pre-incarnation glory with the Father; this is the glory which He laid aside on coming to earth. His life and ministry on earth had 'glorified' the Father (v.4), because Jesus had finished the work His Father gave Him to do. Jesus' request that the Father glorify Him was answered in the way the Father supported Him at the cross, and later bringing Him out of the grave and setting Him at His own right hand in heaven.

Another very important theme is 'eternal' or 'everlasting life', mentioned 17 times in this Gospel. Jesus explains what 'eternal life' is: it is knowing the almighty God personally as Father and that He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Possession of eternal life means possessing Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord at this present moment (1 John 5:20,21). 'Knowing' the Father is a continuous course of progressive knowing. There will never be an end to knowing the Father who is infinite.

It is important to emphasise that it is not possible to know the Father without knowing the Son (14:6-11). No one can know the true God apart from

the Son whom He sent, and who is Himself the personal embodiment and manifestation of the true God. Those who do not accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God cannot know the true God. It is not enough simply to 'believe in God'; this will never save a lost soul from hell. James tells us, "You believe that there is one God? Good. Even demons believe that – and shudder" (2:19). All who trust Jesus Christ as Saviour receive the gift of eternal life. Because we share His life, we are overcomers; for we also share His victory (1 John 5:4). When we were born the first time (physically), we were born 'in Adam' and were 'losers'. When we were born again (spiritually) through faith in Christ, we were born 'winners'!

Jesus makes request for His disciples (vv.6-19)

The Lord Jesus is concerned that His disciples will be preserved from disunity (v.11), and that they might be kept separate from all that is evil (v.10). He consecrates Himself, setting Himself apart entirely to take care of them (v.19). Jesus Christ is a wonderfully caring Saviour!

The Jews knew God as Jehovah – the great I AM (Exodus 3:11-14). Jesus took the sacred name 'I AM' and made it meaningful to His disciples. He said, "I am the bread of life" (6:35). So here He can rightly say, "I have manifested Thy name" (v.6). It is not surprising, then, that the name

'Father' is used 53 times in chapters 13-17, and a total of 122 times in this Gospel. Addressing the Jewish nation, Jesus made it clear that the Father sent Him, and that He was equal to the Father, and also that His words and works came from the Father. This was His positive claim to deity, but they refused to believe it.

Usually, at least for Hebrews, names were given to reveal something particular about the character and nature of the one who bore the name. For example, "...and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus means Saviour. So when Jesus said, "I have manifested Thy name", He meant, "I have revealed what Your nature is". But the Lord Jesus revealed this to them only as much as they were able to bear it (16:12) – not all at once, for God is infinite!

The security of the disciples

The main emphasis of vv.6-12 is the security of the disciples. It is good that we realise that we cannot keep ourselves for one single moment. Our safety does not depend on our own character, conduct, or efforts, but on the very nature of God. We must remember that believers are the Father's gift to His Son! Would God the Father give to His Son a gift which would not last, or even become lost? Jesus loves each one of His own – He watches over us and keeps us

and even now prays constantly for us in heaven! Let us all remember this when things are difficult – it is such a wonderful comfort. Not only the Lord Jesus, but the Father also, takes good care of us.

The unity of the disciples

Now the Lord prays for the unity of the disciples: “that they may be one, as We are” (v.11). The Lord makes a clear distinction between His disciples and the world in which they live (v.9). To bring out even more strongly the contrast between them and this sinful world, He addresses His Father as “Holy Father”. They are called to be holy, even as He is holy. He is far removed from evil; His very nature is holy. As children of their heavenly Father, they have His very nature: “whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). V.11 mentions the first of the three ‘unities’ in this chapter. We might call this ‘the organic unity’, because it speaks of the unity that exists between the Father and the Son in thought, aims and purposes. This unity in origin and nature was seen in the disciples at Pentecost: “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common” (Acts 4:32). They were all seen as being

separate from the world-system and totally consecrated to God. There was total oneness in spirit, affection and aim. Jesus asks His Father that His disciples will be kept in this hostile world. Whilst the Lord was with them, He had kept them. It is awful to think that even the constant presence of the Lord Jesus failed to win Judas Iscariot (v.12). Where the Holy Spirit does not bring the truth home to the conscience, there is only continued hardness and indifference. These verses do show very positively, however, that not one of those ‘given to Christ’ can ever, or will ever, be lost.

The word of God gives us joy, and this inward joy gives us strength to overcome the world and sin. We must never picture the Lord Jesus going around with a long face and melancholy disposition. He was both a “man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3) and also a Person of deep, abiding joy. His joy was not the fleeting levity of a sinful world, but an abiding enjoyment of the Father and His word. He did not depend on outward happenings for His joy but on inward, spiritual resources. This is the kind of joy He wants us to have. We can experience this joy when we enjoy His word. “Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16). The word of God not only imparts the joy of the Lord, but it also assures us of His love.

That word enables us to enjoy the Father’s love, and it imparts to us God’s power for holy living (vv.15-17). When we were saved, we were set apart for God. As we grow more in our love for Him, we shall want to serve Him and be a blessing to others. His word also gives us what we need in order to serve Him as witnesses in this world (vv.18,19). The Lord Jesus has set Himself apart for us in heaven, where He prays for us that our witness for Him will be fruitful and many souls will repent of their sins and turn to Him.

Jesus makes request for His Church (vv.20-26)

This section is primarily concerned with the future of His disciples, and brings in us, in our day, too. Up till now, the Lord Jesus has used the word ‘pray’. Here He says, ‘I will’ or ‘I want’. This indicates a new character of plea. It signifies that He now sees Himself as having taken up again with the Father that position of glory which He occupied before the world was. He has already prayed about our security and sanctity; now the burden of His prayer is unity.

Christians may belong to different fellowships, but they all belong to the Lord and to each other. What is the basis for Christian unity? It is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and His glory (vv.2-5). Christian harmony is not based on the externals of the flesh, but on the internals and eter-

nals of the Holy Spirit in the inner person.

One of the things which most impresses the unbelieving world around us is when Christians love each other and live together in harmony. It is the witness which the Lord Jesus wants in the world: “that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (v.21). What the world sees in Christians is what they will believe about God! If they see love and unity, they will believe that God is love. If they see hatred and division, they will reject the message of the Gospel. We have every reason to love one another and live in harmony. Do we not trust the same Saviour, and do we not share the same glory? We will one day enjoy the same heaven!

What a wonderful comfort we have in v.24: “Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am...” Here we are assured that all true Christians go to heaven because of the price which the Lord Jesus has paid; and the promise He has made (14:1-6); and the prayer He has prayed (v.24).

How wonderful it would be if we, too, one day could stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be able to say in some measure, “I have glorified You on the earth; I have finished the work which You gave me to do”!

“That the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me”

Eternal Life

Part 1

Donald Davison

“That eternal life which was with the Father” (1 John 1:2). These words still fill the Christian with a sense of wonder. As Christians, we can enjoy the blessedness of eternal life as a present possession, even though we may not be able to define it. This first part of a two part series explores the wonder of eternal life.

The subject of eternal life is a vitally important one for all, Christian and non-Christian alike. It is found throughout Scripture, though the bearing and scope of it is distinct and different in each Testament. It is necessary, therefore, to look first at the Old Testament and then to look at the immense difference between that and the way the subject is presented in the New Testament.

Like many subjects in Scripture, this theme is gradually developed until it is revealed in all its fullness in the New Testament. We are entirely dependent upon the revelation of it in Scripture, for the truth concerning it can be found nowhere else. As believers, with confidence in the word of God, we are instructed in the truth of it in a way that the men of this world can never be.

There are two ways in which the subject is vital to each one of us: firstly, so as to possess it, as counteracting the effects of sin and death; secondly, so as to understand it and enter into the meaning and the enjoyment of it.

The subject involves a deeper issue than simply living forever and never dying. There is not only the physical aspect of living forever upon earth or in heaven but, more importantly, there is also a

spiritual aspect. That spiritual aspect is the most important part of it as revealed in the New Testament. The subject is deep and this study can never exhaust all that can be said about it. Its aim is to help each other to a better understanding and appreciation of this vast subject. If we can encourage each other to look into Scripture to discover more in relation to this subject, that aim will have been realised.

It will be convenient to consider this subject under several headings.

Dying and death

The first reference to dying and death is found in Genesis 2:16,17. All the trees in the Garden of Eden were available to man for food except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The divine prohibition upon this tree was: “For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Death has been the universal judgment upon everyone since the day that Adam sinned, with the two notable exceptions of Enoch and Elijah who were translated to heaven without dying.

James sums up what took place that day in Eden when Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit: “When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”

(1:15). Adam and Eve possessed life and, had they not sinned, they would have continued to live forever upon earth. The tree of life was no test to their obedience at that time, for they were in possession of life direct from the creating hand of God. The crafty serpent draws Eve’s attention to another tree, insinuating divine withholding of blessing from it. Satan begets in her a mistrust in God and a desire to eat of this tree so as to obtain what he insinuates God has held back from them.

1 John 2:16 states, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” These three classic elements of lust were fully displayed by Eve that day: “And when the woman saw that the tree *was good for food* (the lust of the flesh), and that it *was pleasant to the eyes* (the lust of the eyes), and a tree to be *desired to make one wise* (the pride of life), she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6). Doubt in the goodness of God, disobedience, lust, sin and death have been the universal rule in the world ever since. This one act of disobedience and defiance against God brought in its train the sorrowful consequence of dying and death, just as God had said.

As to physical death, when Adam sinned the sentence of death immediately came into force; but the execution of that sentence did not take place until Adam was 930 years old (Genesis 5:5). However, this was not the only consequence of Adam’s sin. From the moment Adam

sinned, he possessed a sinful nature and a conscience in place of innocence. Adam had a nature which recognised the good, but was incapable of producing it; and a nature which recognised evil without the power to resist it, and even enjoyed doing it despite the consequences! “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” (Proverbs 9:17).

That man now possessed a conscience is clear from the narrative that tells us that, as soon as the guilty pair heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, instead of rejoicing in their Creator and Maker, they ran away and hid themselves from Him. As springing from this sinful pair, we each know to our sorrow to what extent we have inherited their same sinful nature and conscience. We are each one equally guilty before God until we have obtained forgiveness through faith in Christ.

As to physical death, therefore, we each must come to it eventually in turn until the coming of the Lord at the Rapture when the dead saints will be raised and the living saints will be changed to rise with them to be forever with the Lord. However, we can say that, for the believer, physical death is not the monster that it is for the unbeliever. When we who are saved close our eyes to this world, we open them in the next.

In Genesis 2:7, we read, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Our bodies may one day die, but what of our souls? Our souls depart to be “with Christ, which is far better”

(Philippians 1:23). We are “absent from the body” and “present (at home) with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). We know from Scripture that the souls of both believers and unbelievers do not die, but live forever. The Lord could say to the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I *am* (not *was*, but in the present tense) the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:31,32). These worthies had been dead as to their bodies for over 1,500 years. The Lord’s words clearly show that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were very much alive and in the presence of God as He spoke.

Similarly, the incident of the rich man and Lazarus spoken of by the Lord in Luke 16 shows that the unbelieving rich man was very much alive in the next world, tormented in the flames, at the same time as Lazarus was being comforted in Abraham’s bosom. So also the Lord could say, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

In view of the foregoing, it is obvious that eternal life and eternal existence are not synonymous terms. All souls live for ever, but not all souls have eternal life. Only the believer in Jesus has eternal life (1 John 5:11-14). The unbelieving have eternal existence but are not, and are never said to be, the possessors of eternal life. There is much more to eternal life

than, as to our souls, never to die. It is this aspect that will be considered now.

The eternity of the Godhead

No believer doubts the eternal being of God, but it is well to establish this truth from Scripture as we begin this study. Deuteronomy 33:27 tells us: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” Here we have ‘eternal’ and ‘everlasting’ in their commonly accepted meanings. Moreover, in this verse, ‘God’ is the well known Hebrew *plural* word ‘Elohim’. It is the same word which greets us in the first verse of our Bible: “In the beginning God”. In the Hebrew language, there is singular, dual, and plural, plural being more than two. From the beginning and throughout Scripture, more than two persons are indicated as comprising the Godhead. Only when we arrive at the New Testament are the veiled references in the Old Testament to the three persons of the Godhead revealed in clearness to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Matthew 3:16,17 is the first such occasion.

John’s writings in particular emphasise this truth. “In the beginning was (ever existed) the word, and the word was (ever existed) with God, and the word was (ever existed) God” (John 1:1). In Hebrews 9:14 we read of the ‘eternal Spirit’. Scripture does not use the exact phrases ‘eternal Father’ or ‘eternal Son’. However, these two truths are emblazoned on the pages of our Bibles from Genesis to Revelation. John 17:5 confirms this in that wonderful prayer of the Son to the Father: “And now glorify me, thou Father, along with thyself, with the

glory which I had along with thee before the world was” (JND trans.). This statement alone confirms the eternal existence of both Father and Son in a unique self-subsisting relationship of love, life and glory.

In John 1:18, we have the statement, “The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father”. In this verse, ‘is’ is in the present continuous tense, being true at all times retrospectively, continuously and prospectively. Here is complete confirmation of the truth of the eternal Son ever and always being in the bosom of the Father from all eternity.

Some may ask, But do we not read in Isaiah 9:6 of the Lord as “the everlasting Father”? Closer examination of this phrase shows that it is more accurately translated ‘Father of eternity’ (JND trans.). This is very wonderful. The words show that not only was the Son in eternity along with the Father before the world was, as we have seen, but that eternity itself is owned as finding its origin and being of and from Him. We are touching some of the “depths of God” and stand in holy wonder, awe and amazement that such truths should be revealed to us!

Life as a principle of existence

Many years ago, W.J. Brett wrote, “Life as a principle of existence is impossible to define, whether considered in relation to the natural or the spiritual. Nevertheless, the fact of its presence is demonstrated by movement, distinguishing between the animate and the inanimate. It is an active principle and, as such, has its origin in God, for “in Him we live, and move, and exist” (Acts

17:28). God is, therefore, the source of all life. Life, of whatever kind, has its origin in God and is derived from God. John 5:26 confirms this: “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself”. So also, “In him was (ever existed) life” (John 1:4).”

Eternal life has been described as “the life by which we live, and in which we live, by the Spirit”. It was not known by Old Testament saints because the full revelation of God and His counsels were not yet disclosed. Eternal life was not known until the Son of God was here in the world and the subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit after His ascension.

We have already stated that life as a principle of existence is impossible to define. But it is possible to say that “eternal life is to live forever in the love of God”.

Eternal life in the Old Testament

It has often been stated that eternal life is only mentioned twice in the Old Testament viz. Psalm 133:3 and Daniel 12:2. Although this is correct, the word translated in these two verses as ‘life for evermore’ and ‘everlasting life’ is found in various other forms over 400 times in the Old Testament, such as ‘for ever’, ‘everlasting’, ‘ancient’, etc.

The first reference to eternal life in Scripture is found in Genesis 3:22. After sin had entered the creation, the LORD God said, “...and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and live for ever...” This clearly shows that ‘duration’, or ‘living for ever’ and ‘never dying’, is its force and significance. To live for ever upon earth and never die! How great a mercy that God

barred the way of sinful man to the tree of life! How horrendous if Adam and Eve had been allowed to eat of the tree of life and both they and their progeny lived forever upon earth. Sin upon sin would have been multiplied to even greater heights (or depths!) if all the sinful men who ever lived, or ever will live upon earth, continued to live forever, sinning again and again. How much havoc has just one man, on occasions, been able to bring about in a few short minutes or months until eventually being stopped by death.

The prospect of such evil men continuing to live forever and never dying leaves even the LORD God unable, as it were, to finish the sentence! This verse is the first of a number of remarkable unfinished sentences found in Scripture. In these,

the consequences in view are too great to be contemplated or expressed even by God Himself!

So then, whilst death is the consequence of sin and, therefore, the judgment of God upon man because of his sin and sinning, it is, at the same time, a great mercy that wicked men, and all of the sinful race, are eventually taken out of the way from the earth by it. The fact that the words “for ever” are used by God shows clearly that they carry the literal and accepted normal meaning of them i.e. ever, always, eternally. This being the first occasion that this phrase is used shows that, in the Old Testament at least, the continuance of life upon earth without dying is what is in view. This is the foremost thought of eternal life in the Old Testament.



The Two Seeds

Part 2

Ernie Bartlett

“I will perform that good thing which I have promised...” (Jeremiah 33:14). These reassuring words of the Lord to Jeremiah are still true. In a world of broken promises and thwarted purposes, how good it is to be reminded that “the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8). Part 1 gave an overview of Satan’s attempts to thwart the promise of God in Eden. In this final part, we look at some further details.

The children of Israel and Pharaoh

About 150 years after the death of Joseph, there arose another king “which knew not Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). Because of the increased population of the children of Israel, Pharaoh gave instruction to the Egyptian midwives to kill the male

children at birth. This further attempt of Satan to destroy the promised seed was frustrated this time by the midwives who feared God and ignored Pharaoh’s orders. One such child was hidden by his mother from the king. He was found by Pharaoh’s daughter and given to his

mother to care for him. The child became the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. Thus we are introduced to Moses.

For the next 40 years, Moses dwelt in Pharaoh’s palace, “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22). But he knew his identity; he knew that he was an Israelite. Moses spent the next 40 years in the desert. At the end of that period, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him and commissioned him to go to Pharaoh and say, “Israel is my son, my firstborn...let my son go, that he may serve me” (Exodus 4:22,23). But Pharaoh would not let the children of Israel go, despite the various plagues sent by God in judgment. The last judgment was the death of the firstborn in Egypt. But through the Passover lamb, God made provision for His own. So Paul can write, “Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). At Calvary, Christ won this great victory for God over Satan, of whom Pharaoh is a type.

The first born in Egypt having been slain, Pharaoh calls for Moses and Aaron by night and commands them, “Rise up, and get you forth from among my people...and be gone” (Exodus 12:31,32). But it was not long before Pharaoh’s heart was hardened again and he sent his soldiers in hot pursuit of the children of Israel. With the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh’s chariots behind them, all appeared lost for the children of Israel. But Moses can say to them, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord...for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever” (Exodus 4:13). Israel

went through the Red Sea on dry land. “The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen...and the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them” (Exodus 14:23-28).

The death of the firstborn speaks to us of the victory of Christ at Calvary. “...that through death he (the true Passover Lamb) might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). But Satan is still an active foe. His venom is now directed at the child of God. The epistle to the Ephesians warns us that “we wrestle... against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world” (6:12). But we can look forward to the day when Satan will be finally defeated (Revelation 20:10). That final defeat is the anti-type of the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea.

Joash and Athaliah

Having left Egypt, the children of Israel travel through the wilderness of Sinai. Because of their unbelief, they could not enter the promised land, but wandered through the wilderness for 40 years. Moses was not permitted to enter the land, having spoken unadvisedly at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh (Deuteronomy 32:51). God chose Joshua to lead the children of Israel into the land. Whilst Joshua was able to drive out many of the nations from the land, a few, with their idolatry, were left unconquered.

After the death of Joshua, there was a return to idolatry. God raised up judges to deliver His people. At this time, we are introduced to the book of Ruth. It was a time when every man did what was right in his own eyes. Naomi, with her husband and two sons, leaves Bethlehem for the land of Moab. Her sons marry Moabites, in defiance of God's law. The New Testament instructs us also not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Naomi's husband and her two sons die. Orpah goes back to her own people whilst Ruth, the other daughter in law, cleaves to Naomi and returns with her to Bethlehem-Judah, Naomi's home. So they are in the very place from which the promised seed would eventually come (Judah was the royal tribe). Many years later, the prophet, Micah, names this as the actual birthplace of the Messiah (5:2).

On her return, Ruth came into contact with a near relative who owned the field where she was sent to glean. Naomi offered for sale a parcel of ground which belonged to her late husband. Under the law, only a near kinsman could redeem it and, in doing so, would have to marry Ruth. There was a kinsman nearer than Boaz, but he declined to redeem it, "for it would mar mine inheritance". So Boaz is set forth as a picture of Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer, for He is not only God, but Man also. Boaz is the father of Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David.

In time, David was anointed king instead of Saul, the people's choice. David conquered Goliath, the champion of the

Philistines, and was applauded by the people. Saul became jealous of David, who had to flee for his life. So David's early years were spent in rejection, as was the Lord Jesus: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:12). But David gathered around him those who were in debt, discontented, and in distress, and became a captain over them (1 Samuel 22:2). So John 1:12 continues, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."

After the death of Saul and Jonathan, David was crowned king, first in Hebron, then in Jerusalem. The Lord is still rejected but, as the hymn puts it, "The crowning day is coming, bye and bye". David wanted to build a house for God. God would not allow this but promised David that his son, Solomon, would "build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (2 Samuel 7:13). So the Lord Jesus could say, "A greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42).

After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into two: the ten tribes of Israel, and the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Some years later, Jehu, the king of Israel, killed Ahaziah, the king of Judah. "But when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah." Did this mean that God's purposes had been defeated? "But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bedchamber...so that [Athaliah] slew

him not. And he was with them hid in the house of God six years" (2 Chronicles 22:9-12). God's purposes can never be destroyed! There is always one who escapes! "I only am escaped alone to tell thee" (Job 1:15, 17,19).

Joash not only escaped the sword of Athaliah, but he was instructed in the ways of God by the godly priest, Jehoida. How thankful we should be for those who are able to teach us the word of God.

When Joash was 7 years old, he was brought into the temple. Jehoida the priest made sure that none but the priests and Levites were there. Anyone else who approached was to be put to death. "Then they brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown, and gave him the testimony, and made him king. And Jehoida and his sons anointed him, and said, God save the king. Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people...she came to the people into the house of the Lord...And, behold, the king stood at his pillar at the entering in...Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, Treason. Then Jehoida the priest...said unto them, Have her forth of the ranges...Slay her not in the house of the Lord. So they...slew her" (2 Chronicles 11-15).

Joash reigned for 40 years. Satan's plans were yet again frustrated; the seed of the woman continued. Joash had a zeal for the house of the Lord. So the Lord Jesus could prophetically declare, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (Psalm 69:9). Joash started well, but when the priest, Jehoida, died, he forsook the Lord

and "remembered not the kindness of Jehoida" (2 Chronicles 24:22).

Esther and Haman

About 100 years went by. The ten tribes were taken into captivity by the Assyrians who repopulated Samaria, so setting up a mixture of true and false worship. After a further 100 years, Judah was also taken into captivity by the Babylonians. This had been prophesied by Jeremiah, but the people took no heed of his warning. Jerusalem was destroyed, the wall broken down. Most of the people were deported to Babylon, some were killed. Only the poor of the land remained.

Amongst those carried away to Babylon was Daniel. He was able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream concerning the image with a head of gold, representing the Babylonian empire. The image's breast and arms of silver represented the empire of the Medes and Persians which would succeed that of Babylon. Jeremiah had already foretold the judgment of Babylon. His prophecy was fulfilled when Babylon was conquered by the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5:30,31).

Cyrus, the Persian emperor, made a decree that those of Judah who were able to return to Jerusalem should go and rebuild the house of the Lord (Ezra 1:1-4). So some 42,360 returned. The book of Esther gives us details of some of those who stayed, amongst whom were Esther and her uncle, Mordecai. The book describes events occurring 70 years after the return to build the house of the Lord.

Ahasuerus, the then king of Persia and Media, made a feast for all his nobles

and princes. Because his wife, Vashti, refused to attend, Ahasuerus ordered that a search be made throughout the kingdom for another queen. Eventually, Esther was chosen because of her beauty. Haman, one of the king's servants, tricked the king into signing a decree that, on a given day, all the Jews in his kingdom were to be killed.

Mordecai charged Esther to go to the king and intercede for her people. This might have meant certain death for her since no one, not even the queen, could approach the king except he held out the golden sceptre.

Esther tells Mordecai, "Go, gather together all the Jews...and fast ye for me...I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king...and if I perish, I perish" (4:16). In the providence of God, the king heard Esther's plea. The lives of all the Jews were spared and Haman, the enemy of the Jews, was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. So once again the seed of the woman was preserved.

Herod and the wise men

The book of Esther is almost the last of the Old Testament historically, apart from Ezra and Nehemiah. Under these last two servants of God, the people had returned to the land and the temple had been rebuilt. The last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, describes a turning away from God. But there was a remnant who "feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (3:16). We read of their spiritual descendants, Simeon and Anna, in the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel.

In Matthew's Gospel, we read how wise men came from the east. They enquire of Herod, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him" (2:2). Herod demands from the scribes where Christ should be born. They are able to refer him to Micah's prophecy giving the very place, Bethlehem. So Herod sends them there, telling them to "search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also" (v.8). Arriving in Bethlehem, they present their gifts to the young child, "and being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way" (v.12).

God warns Joseph in a dream to take the young child and his mother into Egypt, where they remain until the death of Herod. On realising that he has been deceived, Herod in his anger orders all the children under the age of 2 years to be killed. But he is too late!

Once more, we see how Satan's designs were frustrated. The Lord grew up having favour with God and men, healing the sick and speaking words of grace. In spite of this, He was taken and crucified – His heel was bruised (Genesis 3:15). But in dying, He brought salvation to Adam's race, having crushed the head of the serpent, Satan. We now await the final destruction of Satan, when Christ will hand back the kingdom to God, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). So God's purposes must ultimately prevail!

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More of my life than I e'er gave before;
By and by when I look on His face,
I'll wish I had given Him more.

By and by when He holds out His hands,
Welcoming hands, nail riven hands,
By and by when He holds out His hands,
I'll wish I had given Him more –
More, so much more,
More of my love than I e'er gave before;
By and by when He holds out His hands,
I'll wish I had given Him more.

In the light of that heavenly place,
Light from His face, beautiful face,
In the light of that heavenly place,
I'll wish I had given Him more –
More, so much more,
Treasures unbounded for Him I adore;
By and by when I look on His face,
I'll wish I had given Him more.