

Scripture Truth



Inside:

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Spiritual fathers
"But I say to you"

Jesus in the midst
Are you a person?
Babel and Abraham
Hebrews: A thumbnail sketch

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Are you a person?

Recently a new robot was reported in the press as being able to think. Without having been programmed to do it, and after a good deal of haphazard flapping of its arms, it eventually settled into picking various objects off the floor and putting them elsewhere. This news story probably said more about the wish-list of modern invention than about the robot itself, but it reinforced a train of thought that, no matter how clever it may be, a robot is not a person.

Being a person is not a matter of cleverness, but of relationships to other persons. But godless natural science, however far it delves, can never come up with an explanation of personhood. It will never be able to do more than imagine us as ultra-complex super-computers. Its explanation for our sense of personhood will always be of the form that this is a sense that emerged to assist co-operation between evolutionary robots — for evolutionary robots is what godless science believes us really to be. Social science is a bit different. But modern thought would surely agree that it is natural science that can tell us, in the end, what we really are.

However we are persons. When we junk our laptops, we don't arrange funerals for them. It is because we regard the deceased as a dear *person* that mourners — whether believers or unbelievers — attend a funeral. Respect for *persons* is fundamental to the principles of “human rights”. But all that science can do is turn personhood into an illusion. Belief in this nasty idea promotes the further idea that we can choose and fashion our own “personas” at will; and this encourages falsity in our relationships with others.

Only persons can understand persons, and only a Person can create persons. To know that I am a person I have to know that I have been made by the infinite Three-Personed God, who made man and woman “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27). What a relief! Although atheists would deny it, an atheistic funeral is, at bottom, a contradiction in terms. If you believe you are a person you have to believe in a God who made you.

THEO BALDERSTON

Spiritual fathers

David Anderson

A thoughtful and thoroughly Biblical article that repays reading and re-reading!

“For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers” (1 Corinthians 4:15, NKJV).

With these words the apostle Paul identified the need for spiritual fathers in the Corinthian church. Spiritual fathers may be defined as older and mature believers who have a fatherly care for younger Christians. Their role within the Christian fellowship is to show spiritual interest in believers who are young in the faith; and to encourage and promote spiritual growth by giving wisdom and guidance to all other believers. (And 1 Timothy 3:5 requires elders to exercise fatherly care in their role as overseers of their local assembly.)

Paul and the Corinthians

Paul himself is a good example of a spiritual father. He regarded all his converts as his spiritual children, and he was always concerned for their spiritual well-being and development. This is very evident with the Corinthians. To complete and expand 1 Corinthians 4:15:

“For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus *I have begotten you* [as my spiritual children] through the gospel” [my emphasis and expansion – DA].

Paul lamented the lack of fatherly care amongst them. This shortcoming was a feature of their carnality. Their teachers were more interested in obtaining a following for themselves than in the spiritual health of their fellow-brethren (cp. 1:11-12 with 1:29-31). So the apostle had to admonish them, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you” (4:14).

1 Corinthians 4:15 is the key to Paul’s attitude. He was the human instrument, the evangelist, whom God had used to bring them to faith in Christ. They were his spiritual children. In this respect he felt responsible to provide for their spiritual well-being – as that of all his converts:

- “I do not seek yours, but you. For children ought not to [provide] for the parents, but the parents for the children” (2 Corinthians 12:14).
- “...you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:11).¹

¹ Paul uses the simile of a nursing mother in v.7.

*“For though you might have
ten thousand instructors in Christ,
yet you do not have many fathers.”*

But it wasn't only his own converts that Paul regarded as his children. He laboured intensely as a spiritual father to all believers:

“Christ...we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (Colossians 1:27-29).

His tender, loving care extended to every believer (see 2 Corinthians 6:11-13 & 1 Thessalonians 2:6-12).

However Paul particularly refers to Onesimus, Timothy, and Titus, each of them, as “my child”. This means that he had a more distinct father-son relationship with each of them than with other converts and believers.

Paul and Onesimus

Onesimus was regarded by Paul as his own child in the faith: “I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment” (Philemon 10, ESV). Through God's providence Onesimus had encountered Paul in prison in Rome, and had become a Christian through Paul's preaching – in the manner that Paul had stated in 1 Corinthians 4:15.

Onesimus's practical response to the gospel – under the fatherly guidance of Paul – was remarkable. He was transformed into a profitable servant to Paul to such an extent that he could serve Paul “by proxy” for his former master. “I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel” (Philemon 13, ESV). In verse 10 Paul had stressed the strong father-and-son relationship that had developed between himself and this runaway slave. And notice the expression of Paul's fatherly affection in verse 12, “Thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels”² (KJV). But verse 19 indicates that Philemon, too, was a spiritual son of Paul's. Paul *appealed* to him to receive Onesimus, rather than *commanding* him to do so (vv.10,14 & 21). So the whole letter is pervaded by the fatherly love of the apostle for these two very different sons in the faith.

² In Greek “bowels” was often used to denote “inner affection”, and is rendered “heart” in NKJV & ESV.

*Paul took on a father's role
to train and nurture the inexperienced Timothy
in spiritual matters*

Paul and Timothy

Timothy was Paul's somewhat special spiritual son – “my true child in the faith,” and “my beloved child” (1 Timothy 1:2 & 2 Timothy 1:2, ESV). Although Timothy was already a believer when Paul was introduced to him, Paul's spiritual and fatherly instincts immediately recognised the young man's unique potential. He chose him to accompany him in his gospel ministry (Acts 16:1-5). Later Paul wrote to the Philippians, “But you know [Timothy's] proven character, that *as a son with his father* he served with me in the gospel” (2:22, NKJV; emphasis added). The idea in those days (though not so prevalent nowadays) was for a son to learn his father's trade so as to provide continuity of the family affairs. Paul took on a father's role to train and nurture the inexperienced Timothy in spiritual matters. First, Timothy worked alongside Paul in his missionary exploits. Then, as Timothy's gift developed, they were able to work either together or separately to maintain and expand the work of the Lord:

- “Timothy... is doing the work of the Lord, as I am” (1 Corinthians 16:10, ESV).
- “I have no one like [Timothy], who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare” (Philippians 2:20, ESV).

When Paul's active service came to an end, he committed the responsibility for the continuance of his ministry to Timothy, as his two letters to Timothy demonstrate. In them the aged apostle provided detailed instructions regarding how Timothy was to take his place: first, at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3, 5, 18 & 5:21)³; and then as the one to whom Paul would pass on the baton of the Truth when he himself was nearing death (2 Timothy 2:2 & 3:14).

Two Scriptures very clearly indicate the special nature of the bond between Paul and Timothy – that of an apostle and his delegate. These passages are 1 Timothy 1:18 (“This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare” – ESV); and 2 Timothy 1:6 (“Stir up the gift of

³ For details, see my article “Timothy at Ephesus”, *Scripture Truth*, April 2017, pp.152-157.

God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” – NKJV). But their spiritual relationship as father and son is evident throughout the two epistles. For example:

- Paul’s concern for Timothy’s physical health, as well as his spiritual well-being. “...keep yourself pure. No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities” (1 Timothy 5:22-23).
- His addressing Timothy by name. “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust” (6:20).
- His reference to their spiritual relationship. “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1, emphasis added).
- His empathy with, and his prayers for Timothy. “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy” (2 Timothy 1:3-4).
- His confidence in Timothy. “You have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. ...But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them” (2 Timothy 3:10-11 & 14).

And indeed the letters are full of Paul’s fatherly, clear instructions, admonitions, training, guidance, exhortations, and encouragements to his son, Timothy!⁴

The apostle John

In his epistles the apostle John regards believers as children in the family of God (e.g., 1 John 2:1). Several times he addresses them as “beloved” because he knows that they are loved by the Father. But in 3 John 4 he calls them “my children [who] walk in truth” and thereby indicates that he is their spiritual father. His overall admonition is that they would continue to be active participants in the life of God’s family, that is, to have fellowship with God the Father and with His Son (1 John 1:3). In 1 John 2:12-17, he grades them according to their maturity within the family of God – as fathers, young men,

⁴ The same is true of Paul’s letter to Titus, another “true child in a common faith” (Titus 1:4, ESV) to the apostle.

*The primary idea of a spiritual father
is that he provides
fatherly love, care, guidance, and help*

and babes. He exhorts each group in distinct ways, tailoring what he says to their particular needs.

Spiritual fathers in the Old Testament

The only spiritual father-and-son relationship that I have identified in the Old Testament is that between Elijah and Elisha. In 1 Kings 19:16 Elijah was told to anoint Elisha to be his replacement. The result was that Elijah "...found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him" (v.19). It seems that Elisha was "trained" over a period of ten years or so. 2 Kings 2 records the "handover day", and of special note is Elisha's request of Elijah, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me" (v.9). It was when Elijah dramatically went up into heaven that Elisha acknowledged Elijah as his father. "Elisha... cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen. So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces" (v.12). But his prayers were answered!

Spiritual mothers

"The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour... teachers of good things – that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Titus 2:3-5).

These verses suggest that Paul envisaged spiritual mother-and-daughter relationships similar to the father-and-son relationships discussed in this article. Whilst what is emphasised is more of a practical nature, this must be based on "sound doctrine" (v.1).

The thought appeals to me, that the Lord's own mother also became a spiritual mother to John, when He committed her into the care of the apostle (John 19:25-27). Furthermore, when Paul refers to Rufus's mother as "his mother and mine" (Romans 16:13), it seems that there was a spiritual dimension to their relationship. And women who gave spiritual guidance in Old Testament times were called "mother[s] in Israel" (Judges 5:7 & 2 Samuel 20:19).

A call for spiritual fathers and spiritual mothers today

As we have seen, in 1 Corinthians 4:15 Paul wrote that there was a need for spiritual fathers. That was in the first-century church. Therefore, that need is as great, if not greater, in the twenty-first century church! The primary idea of a spiritual father is that he provides fatherly love, care, guidance, and help for the family of God in his local Christian fellowship. This will supplement the teaching and instruction that he ministers, or that they otherwise receive. A special “father-and-son” type of spiritual bond between an older and a younger brother can be of particular help to the latter.

As brethren, we have majored on sound doctrine. Knowledge has a tendency to puff up, but love edifies (1 Corinthians 8:1). Is there a danger that Paul’s criticism could be applied to us? Paul’s fatherly concerns were an outcome of his desire to see people saved as he preached the gospel. His converts became his spiritual children, whom he wanted to see grow in faith and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, as noted in the last paragraph, there is a parallel role of equal importance for spiritual mothers. In their respective roles, mature brothers and mature sisters should have the same spiritual desires for younger believers.⁵

My personal testimony is that throughout my youth I was greatly helped and encouraged by spiritual men and women who were interested in my Christian development. They promoted this development, firstly, by getting me involved in gospel activities (Sunday school teaching, open-air preaching, but more especially in camp work, where “succession planning” was – and is – very necessary). And, secondly, by encouraging me in all aspects of assembly fellowship. One or two of these brethren were provided by the Lord as special spiritual guides to me.

In conclusion, the exhortation of Ephesian 6:4 could be adapted and applied to spiritual fathers and spiritual mothers. “[Spiritual] fathers [and mothers]...bring [your spiritual] children up in the training and admonition of the Lord”!

⁵ Although I have referred to their roles separately, the point must be made that husband and wife can work very effectively together with their spiritual children (cp. Acts 18:26).

Mature brothers and mature sisters should have the same spiritual desires for younger believers

Jesus in the midst

Part I

George Stevens

When here on earth the Lord was central to every group of people He was ever amongst. One can think one's way through the Gospels and find the truth of it from Luke 2:16 to Luke 24:50-51. Here we shall seek to learn from two important examples of it.

I. In the midst of the doctors

Religious experts in Jerusalem were astounded by the boy called Jesus. In Luke 2:46-47 we read,

“And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.” (KJV)

In verse 40 of this chapter we read, “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him”. This shows that in bodily stature He grew as any other child might, but that He also “waxed strong in spirit”. The spirit is that high part of a human being that particularly responds to God.¹ The will and affections of the child Jesus were true to God. His understanding and judgment were sound. He was filled with wisdom – showing that He could effectively apply His knowledge and understanding to diverse situations.

Later in the chapter (v. 52) we also read, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” This reveals four aspects of His development, the mental, physical, spiritual, and behavioural. The last of these was revealed in His gracious attitude. He was indeed the Word become flesh – full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Therefore the favour of God was towards this Child, and He was esteemed in the affections of those people who were acquainted with Him.

These two verses, then, describe the Lord Jesus at the time when one particular annual Feast of Passover prompted Mary and Joseph to bring Him with them to Jerusalem. Passover was one of the three principal feasts of the Jews, the others being Pentecost and Tabernacles. These three feasts prophetically

¹ Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New-Testament Words* (1939) gives many aspects of meaning to the word, depending on the context. Some of these show the spirit as the “sentient” part of man, while another simply defines it as “character”.

*When here on earth
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symbolised the death of Christ (Passover); the coming of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), and the second advent of Christ to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords (Tabernacles).

It was customary for Mary and Joseph to attend Passover. They brought Jesus with them on this occasion because He had reached His twelfth year. This was the time when a boy was preparing for his induction into full membership of the worshipping community of Israel as “a son of the Law”, something that would happen during his thirteenth year. (Among Jews today the equivalent, Bar Mitzvah, is the initiation ceremony of a boy who has reached the age of 13 into the religious community, and he is deemed eligible to take part in public worship.)

Of course the number “twelve” throughout Scripture indicates “administration” or “rule”. The fact that Jesus was twelve and already about His Father’s (i.e., God’s) business (see Luke 2:49) showed that He was the One prophesied to bear the government. “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).

The Passover was on the one hand a celebration of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt under the power of God. The blood of the Passover Lamb (unlike today, the lamb was still eaten in the Lord’s time) spoke of God’s deliverance of the firstborn of Israel from judgment. But on the other hand, as just indicated, it prefigured the future of Jesus. He would be the true Passover Lamb who would be sacrificed for us. He is the true Lamb of God who delivers us from the judgment of God against sin.

When the Passover and the days of unleavened bread were completed, Mary and Joseph started back to Jerusalem with their family and friends, in a large company of people called a “caravan”. This afforded them protection from wild beasts and thieves. Initially they hadn’t realised that Jesus had remained behind in Jerusalem. They must have assumed that He was among their family and friends.

*“How is it that ye sought me?
wist ye not
that I must be about my Father’s business?”*

After a day’s journey, they looked for Him among the caravan – unsuccessfully. They then returned to Jerusalem and spent three days searching for Him. This lapse of time shows the dependence of the boy Jesus on God His Father, because Scripture is silent as to where He stayed or who supplied His temporal needs during it.

His mother and stepfather eventually found Him in the temple in the midst of the religious teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. This He did in such a way as to astound all who heard Him with His understanding and His answers.

Concerning the “doctors” (or, recognised law-teachers) Edersheim summarises what the Talmud has to say: “The members of the Temple-Sanhedrin, who on ordinary days sat as a Court of Appeal from the close of the Morning Sacrifice to the time of the Evening Sacrifice, were wont on Sabbaths and feast-days to come out upon ‘the Terrace’ of the Temple, and there to teach.”² If such experts in the Jewish faith were astounded by the questions and answers of Jesus, then this emphasises the remarkable capacity and understanding He had for the things of God.

Mary and Joseph were also astonished to find Him in this setting. His mother asked why He had treated them in this way and caused them so much sorrow. Joseph, being His step-father, remained silent.

Jesus replied with two questions, “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (v.49).

Verse 50 is a sad verse, for it shows that neither Mary nor Joseph understood what He was saying. Mary should have known. She had received the message from Gabriel concerning her son being the Christ, the Son of God. Joseph also should have remembered that His birth was miraculous and that he had been instructed to call Him “Jesus” because He would “save His people from their sins”. Both should have remembered the angelic testimony imparted to the shepherds, declaring Jesus to be a Saviour, Christ the Lord. Mary should have

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883), p. 656 as reproduced in the online Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

recalled the wise men bowing before Him in worship because He was the Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre out of Israel, namely, the King of the Jews.

When Christ spoke about “His Father’s business” He was speaking about the work of God His Father. In John 16:28 He would say, “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.” Shortly afterwards He would pray to His Father, saying: “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4). While serving here, He said: “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34).

Following the episode in the temple, “He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.” (Luke 2:51). This is a remarkable verse, for it emphasises the humility, love, and faithfulness of Christ, both to His earthly parents and to His heavenly Father. His obedience brought glory to God.

As for His mother Mary, she made a point of noting His sayings, “in her heart”. In the Jewish culture this phrase speaks generally of “committing to memory”, but here it seems to go further – she treasured them! Oh, that we might set Christ in the midst of our hearts, and do the same!

2. In the midst of malefactors

“And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same

*Mary made a point
of noting His sayings,
“in her heart”*

*“One thief was lost so that none may presume.
One thief was saved so that none need despair.”*

condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:32-43).

We know from Matthew’s Gospel (27:44) that both criminals “*railed on*”, or reviled, Jesus when their crosses were first set up. Like the priests, scribes, and elders, they said words like, “You saved others, but you cannot save yourself. If you’re the king of Israel, get down from the cross. You said you trusted in God, so why doesn’t He deliver you? Did you not claim to be the Son of God?”

But with one of them *railing* turned to *repentance*. Our passage above tells us that as time passed, and they heard the words of Jesus and observed His attitude to His enemies, one of the robbers had a change of heart and put His faith in the Man on the middle cross.

His confession of repentance came as part of a rebuke to his fellow-criminal. It commenced with the words, “Don’t you fear God, seeing you’re in the same condemnation?” This robber recognised the need to fear the God who was able to destroy both soul and body in hell. If the judgment of *men* had put them each on a cross, how much more severe the judgment of *God* would be! The repentant robber continued with the words that voiced his repentance, “And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds.” He bore witness to his colleague that the verdict pronounced upon them was just, because their actions had deserved it. He confessed his own guilt along with that of the other man.

But then he went on to say, “but this man has done nothing wrong.” He also witnessed to the *righteousness* of the Lord Jesus and, in so doing, was saying that man’s verdict upon Him was totally unjust.

Then the robber made a *request*. He turned to the Lord Jesus and asked, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” First, he called Jesus, “Lord”. He recognised the supreme authority of Christ. “Lord” is used to translate “Yahweh” in the Septuagint. He asks the Lord to remember him when He

takes up His kingdom. Therefore, he believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God and true King of Israel.

And, finally, he received *reassurance* from the Lord Jesus, who said unto him, “Verily I say unto you, To day you shall be with me in paradise.” The robber’s salvation was immediate. His faith in Christ had delivered him. Jesus assured him that he would be in Paradise with Himself that very day. The dying thief was saved and secured by Christ. Paradise is a place of delights that no earthly language can describe. It is the third heaven. The apostle Paul speaks of it in 2 Corinthians 12:4. It is the place for the souls of those who have trusted in Jesus. There the saved criminal would find that in the presence of Christ there is fulness of joy; at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore (Psalm 16:11). As one of old wrote, “One thief was lost so that none may presume. One thief was saved so that none need despair.”

It is still true today. When a believer mentions the name of Jesus this immediately makes Him central to that conversation, changing its “atmosphere”. Maybe the mention of His name will be ignored verbally by all other participants in the conversation. But it will have challenged all of them. No other name, religious or secular, has the power to do that. The intervention of the boy Jesus entirely changed that learned conversation in the temple courts, and challenged all the doctors present; with what results, we do not know. The presence of Jesus challenged both robbers beside Him, and changed everything for one of them. For the other, salvation was as near to him as the Man on the middle cross, and he refused it.

The intervention of the boy Jesus entirely changed that learned conversation in the temple courts.

The presence of Jesus challenged both robbers beside Him, and changed everything for one of them.

Hebrews

A thumbnail sketch

Ernest Bartlett and Theo Balderston

The great theme of the epistle to the Hebrews is how the Lord is bringing the “many sons to glory” (2:10). It enables us believers to understand our present situation, between the cross and the glory. It was originally addressed to Jews of two types, and it will help us to know this. We can call these two types *professors*, and *possessors*. Both had left Judaism for Christianity. But had both really found *Christ*? Not the so-called *professors*. They were mixing with the Christian company, perhaps finding social and economic advantages in doing so; but only “professing” outwardly to be Christians. They were like the “mixed multitude” that left Egypt along with the Israelites on the Passover night (Exodus 12:38).

But there were also the *possessors*; those who had truly “found Christ”. We should also notice that *professors* can become *possessors*, but *possessors* cannot lapse into *professors* (see below).

However this distinction only begins to matter from chapter 3. The first two chapters of Hebrews answer three vital question regarding the Lord Jesus, “the Captain of our salvation.”

- Who is He?
- What did He do? and
- Where is He now?

These three questions are substantially answered in chapter 1, verses 2-3,

“... hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom he [that is, God] hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who, being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and

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Chapter 1 has established the truth of our Lord's deity, chapter 2 opens out His humanity

upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (KJV).

From this statement we see that Jesus is great because of who He is: God's Son. He was Creator, and is Sustainer of the universe. He is therefore God in every sense, as the rest of the chapter shows in greater detail. He is Son, and to Him, not to angels, were the great prophetic texts of Psalms 45:6-7 & 102:24-27 addressed. Angels are only servants (Hebrews 1:7, 14).

But verse 3 also tells us that Jesus is great because of *what He has done*: "who... by himself purged our sins". So great a Person did so great a thing. This involved His becoming Man, enduring pain, and dying on the cross.

"Where is He now"? Verse 3 answers this question too: "He...sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high." This answer echoes Psalm 110:1, "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand..." In a nutshell, He is in the place of supremacy! The epistle to the Hebrews maintains this perspective throughout. See chapters 8:1; 10:12; 12:2.

After chapter 1 has established the truth of our Lord's deity, chapter 2 opens out His humanity. Following an introductory warning to take heed to the gospel (2:1-4), it tells us that Jesus was "... made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death" (2:9). God cannot die, so God the Son became Man to bring salvation within the grasp of mankind, by making propitiation¹ for our sins, and thereby destroying "him that had the power of death, that is the devil" (2:14, 17)). In this way the Lord Jesus fulfilled the ancient words of the LORD God to the serpent, "It [i.e., the promised 'Seed' of the woman] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

From chapter 2:17 through to chapter 10:21 the principal theme of the epistle – though with interruptions – is *the priesthood of Christ*. In two key verses (2:17-18) the writer tells us that Jesus was made like us in all things (sin, of course, apart – see 4:15) for two purposes: to be able to offer Himself for us, *and* to render Him able to be our high priest,

"for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted [or, tried], he is able to succour [give aid to] them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

¹ As it should be translated; not "reconciliation" as in the KJV.

Just like present-day converts from Islam, the Jewish believers of that day were being given a hard time by their countrymen. It is as their High Priest that the Lord would enable them – and enables us – to survive and complete our “marathon” through this world to His heavenly glory (12:2).

This being so, chapter 3:1 addresses us as partakers of that “heavenly calling”. Chapters 3 & 4 liken our pathway to heaven to the journeyings of Israel through the wilderness towards the Promised Land. On this basis it warns the readers not to fall by the way (3:7 – 4:11). In Israel’s case all adults who came out of Egypt perished through unbelief, except Joshua and Caleb (3:12-19). In these chapters, therefore, the writer of Hebrews distinguishes between *possessors* and *professors*. He encourages the former when he writes “we who have believed do enter into rest” (4:3), and he warns the latter when he writes, “...lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (4:11).

Chapter 4 ends by returning to the matter of our Lord’s High Priesthood, with a moving appeal to “find grace to help in time of need” by approaching the High Priest who now sits on “the throne of grace” (4:14-16). How much we need such a high priest to support us through the “wilderness” of this world on our way to heaven!

Chapter 5 reinforces the certainty of our Lord’s High Priesthood by showing that He fulfilled the two great qualifications needed for this office: He was taken from among men – so He can sympathise with them (vv.2, 7-8); and He was called by God (vv. 4-6). At the end of the chapter the writer adds that our Lord is a special kind of high priest, one “after the order of Melchisedec.” The significance of this will be disclosed in chapter 7.

Meanwhile the writer again challenges the readers in chapter 6 as to the reality of their faith: were they merely *professors* (6:4-8), or actual *possessors*? (6:9-20) This chapter has generated much controversy regarding whether true believers can lose their faith. It’s important to see what the Scripture as a whole teaches. When we came to know the Lord, we received promises such as John 3:16 & 5:24, assuring us that because we believed we were guaranteed eternal life. Paul calls eternal life God’s gift (Romans 6:23). And, indeed, Hebrews 6:9 shows that the writer believed his readers to be *possessors*, because their record confirmed this (v.10), because their salvation was assured by the immutable promise of God to Abraham, and because Christ has entered “within the veil”, i.e., into the innermost heaven *as their Forerunner* (vv.13-20).

The last verse of chapter 6 returns to the theme of Melchisedec, first mentioned in 5:10. In Psalm 110:4, the Lord Jesus is addressed as “a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec”; and in chapter 7 the writer explains this reference. The

*The greatness of His work on the cross
guarantees the greatness of the place
where He now exercises His High Priesthood*

brief mention of the historical Melchisedec occurs in Genesis 14:18ff, where Abraham treats him as his superior. So the Lord's priesthood is superior to that of Aaron, who was merely Abraham's descendant (Hebrews 7:4-10). There is a deeper reason for this superiority. Genesis is a book full of genealogies, but it does not mention Melchisedec's parentage, birth, or death. This makes him a "type" of the eternal Son of God (7:1-3), who, unlike Aaron and his sons, is "a priest for ever". Christ's priesthood *supersedes* the priesthood exercised by Aaron's descendants, and *exceeds* it because He is "a priest for ever". He always lives to make intercession for us (7:25), and so can save us "to the uttermost."

Chapter 8 verse 1 sums up the point reached: "we have such an high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." If He were on earth, He would not be entitled to be a priest in the temple (v.4), but the fact of the new covenant shows that the old covenant and its priesthood are passing away (8:6-13).

And now the writer turns from focussing on Christ's Person to focussing on the place where He exercises His priestly ministry – the heavenly sanctuary. Chapter 9 contrasts the Lord's sacrifice of Himself and entry into heaven (9:24) with the sacrifices of the old covenant, and particularly with the high priest's brief, annual entries into the holiest place on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16). Christ has entered permanently into heaven itself, "not... by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood... having obtained an eternal redemption for us" (9:12). The greatness of His work on the cross guarantees the greatness of the place where He now exercises His High Priesthood.

In 9:27-28 there is an appointment that man in general cannot cancel, or postpone, namely, death, followed by judgment. But Christ has cancelled judgment for the believer, when He Himself bore the judgment for the believer's sins, and may well cancel death too, for: "to them that look for him shall he appear a second time without [i.e., "apart from"] sin, unto salvation."

Chapter 10:1-18 deepen the theme of chapter 9 by contrasting the constantly repeated sacrifices of Israel's tabernacle (that could never make the worshippers perfect – vv.1-2), with the one sacrifice of Christ, after which He

What makes the vital difference between a professor and a possessor? Faith

“sat down” (10:11-12), because “by one offering He [had] perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (v.14). As a consequence of this, the writer bids us to have the “boldness” to enter the holiest even now “by the blood of Jesus”, to “draw near” to God “in full assurance of faith” through that perfect offering made at Calvary, (10:19-23).

Having reached this high point, the writer devotes verses 26-31 of chapter 10 to warning the *professors* in the most solemn language not to turn back. The rejection of Christ on the part of those who had previously professed His name will incur an unspeakable judgment (10:26-29). And yet *professors* can become *possessors* (though not *vice versa*), and *possessors* themselves *remain* in the faith because they pay attention to such solemn warnings; so the writer can conclude the chapter by entreating his readers in gentler terms. (10:32-36).

What makes the vital difference between a *professor* and a *possessor*? Faith. The last part of chapter 10 therefore treats the readers as people who “live by faith” and do not “draw back” to perdition (10:36-39). Chapter 11 cites many Old-Testament exemplars of the life of faith – from Abel (not Adam!) to unnamed martyrs of the period before Christ came (11:33-39) – as encouragements to the readers to persist in the path of faith. We, too, all suffer spiritual adversity in one form or another, be it from neighbours, work-colleagues, or from our own families.

But the writer has not finished this recitation of the faithful until he has mentioned “the leader and completer of faith” (12:2, Darby Trans.), Jesus, who

“for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2).

We too are to run the race, the marathon, that is set before us, the race that He Himself ran. And our goal is the very place where He, in virtue of His own blood, has already entered – heaven itself.

Chapter 12 then becomes a further encouragement to the *possessors* not to despise the chastening hand of God in their lives. “For whom the Lord loves, he chastens” (12:6). But then he again addresses the *professors*. From verse 15 there is a warning concerning any who “fail of the grace of God,” citing Esau as an example. All through the epistle we get warnings regarding those who

mingled with the believers, though not themselves genuine (compare Jude 4). However these warnings are given in this epistle so that *professors* might become *possessors*!

But then the writer again turns to treating his readers as *possessors*, and encouraging them with a summary statement of where they stand now (vv.18ff). They are no longer overhung, so to speak, by the threatening mountain of Sinai, but instead have come in spirit to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the church of the first-born, to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling which speaks better things than the blood of Abel (12:22-24). Abel's blood had called for vengeance; Jesus' blood speaks cleansing and forgiveness. Yet the chapter once more ends with a solemn warning to *professors*: "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh" (v.25).

Chapter 13 concludes with various personal exhortations regarding the journey to heaven. It begins with the greatest Christian virtue, love, which will outlast all other gifts (see 1 Corinthians 13). The writer then exhorts the readers to remember fellow-believers in prison for their faith (v.2), before affirming the sanctity of marriage (v.4 – a necessary word for our times!), and warning against covetousness (vv. 5-6). God had promised never to leave them nor forsake them (cp. Joshua 1:5), and here we can recollect the word of the psalmist, "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken..." (Psalm 37:25).

Then the writer addresses his readers' responsibilities as a company of the people of God. They were to respect "those who had the rule over" them (13:7,17), and not fall prey to the many "strange doctrines" that, then as well as now, were swirling about them (v.9). They were to take their position outside the camp of Judaism, sharing Christ's rejection (vv.10-13). They were to be a *praising* people, but also a *giving* people (vv.15-16).

The closing words of the epistle commend the *possessors* to the Lord's effective working in them to do His will, as the great Shepherd who shed His blood for us in a covenant that will never be superseded. And *professors* can become *possessors*, but not *vice versa*!

*They were to be a praising people,
but also a giving people*

Babel and Abraham

F.B.Hole

Hole's lively and instructive comments are always worth reading, never more so than in this excerpt, where they illuminate the relevance of these ancient events for the present day. The present series commenced in Scripture Truth in July 2017.

For some time after the flood nations did not exist. All men were descendants of Noah – a rapidly increasing family, but all speaking alike (Genesis 11:1). As time went on population increased and the urge to push outward from the original centre became irresistible. The pioneers of this movement were doubtless the more daring and forceful individuals, who soon became conscious that their migration from the centre of things might entail a loss of prestige and power. This they determined to remedy by a bold stroke. Human history had started again under Noah in the mountainous region of Ararat, but these migrants now found themselves on a flat and uninteresting plain with no commanding heights. So they would build themselves a city surrounding a tower of immense height, and thus make themselves a name (11:2).

When considering the last verse of Genesis 4¹, we noted that the name that Seth gave his son was significant, for Enos means “mortal” and “weak”. Seth recognized man’s frail, mortal nature, and it is at once said that “...then men began to call on the name of the LORD” (KJV). What is now before us is in direct contrast with that. Here were men full of self-sufficiency and self-importance, bent upon making a name for themselves.

The expression, “Go to” (Genesis 11:4, KJV) is old-fashioned. Today we would say, “Come on!” They incited one another in their course of self-aggrandisement. They had left the regions where stone was plentiful, so they invented brick-making; and the “slime,” or “bitumen,” which abounds in the Mesopotamian plain served them as mortar. The Nimrod episode (Genesis 10:8²) had taken place somewhat earlier. That was one man exalting himself at the expense of his fellows. The tower-of-Babel episode was mankind concerting together for their own self-glorification in establishing a great centre of power and influence. It is an interesting fact that the archaeologists who explore the ruined cities of the Mesopotamian plain often allude to the “ziggurats” – that is, large elevated structures around which cities in that region were originally grouped. So the tower idea evidently became quite popular in those far-off days. In that part of the world they became the “high places” where idols and idol sacrifices flourished.

¹ See *Scripture Truth* July 2018, p.302.

² See *Scripture Truth* January 2019, p.23.

The eyes of the LORD rested upon the doings at Babel. He not only saw their immediate significance, but foresaw their ultimate development, as is so strikingly presented in verse 6. "And now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do." He knew the capacities with which He had endowed mankind, and the imaginations that would fill their minds as fallen creatures. Those imaginations are only evil continually, as we read in chapter 6:5. If the human race had been left in unbroken unity, and to develop into hundreds of millions, all their evil imaginations would have found speedy accomplishment. Hence God's action in confounding the language of the spreading families of mankind, thus putting a heavy brake on the wheels of man's chariot of progress.

We may pause to observe that now, for the last century or two, there has been renewed effort to consolidate the human race. There have been efforts to provide a universal language. Scientific and technical knowledge is much more freely pooled, and in result things have been achieved that 200 years ago would have seemed simply incredible. The ancients entertained the imagination of men flying like birds. The imagination was there, but would it ever be translated into fact? It did not look like it! Yet the Lord had said, "Nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do" (11:6). We have reached the twentieth century after Christ, and lo! these things are done. We are living in an age when there is being unfolded before our eyes the implications of Genesis 11:6. Had it not been for the confusion of language the atom bomb would have arrived far earlier in the world's history, and mankind had well-nigh destroyed itself long ago.

The Governor of the nations acted in judgment at Babel, and we can thank Him that He did so, since an element of mercy was enfolded in His judgment. The scattering of mankind into language-groups was the inevitable result, and the building of Babel was halted. Each individual had of necessity to go with those who spoke as he did, and each language-group naturally separated itself from the others, who became foreigners to it, and with whom at the outset no intelligent communication was possible. Hence by this one act of God – the fruit of His wisdom and power – the plans of men were brought to nothing. Their purpose had been centralization, lest they should be scattered. The Divine act produced in the simplest possible way the very thing they aimed at preventing. We regard this as a sign given in the very early days of the present world-system of how God will always react in the presence of men's evil schemes and projects.

Consequently men are again and again bringing upon themselves the things they aim at avoiding. And not only so, they also produce "Babel," that is, confusion. Was ever mankind so full of ideas and theories and projects as today? And was ever the earth more filled with confusion? We may be sure that though the mills

of God's government grind slowly they grind with precision. Earth's outlook is terrifying apart from the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord.



Chapter 11 verse 10 starts the fifth paragraph, or division, of the Book of Genesis. Chapter 10 began the generations of the sons of Noah. We now come to the generations of Shem, one of the shortest of these divisions. It extends only to the end of verse 26, and gives us names and ages of the patriarchs descended from Shem up to the time of Abraham. In connection with this division I should point out that, as already noted in connection with the ages of the patriarchs before the flood, there is again discrepancy between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Septuagint. Any chronology that may be deduced as to the lapse of time between Shem and Abraham is rendered doubtful to the extent of 650 years.

The "generations of Terah" begin with 11:27, and do not end until we reach the death of Abraham in Genesis 25. As to Terah himself, we learn in 11:28 & 31 that Ur of the Chaldees was his home, but that late in his life he left Ur to go to the land of Canaan. But he halted at Haran on his way. With him he had Abram and Sarai, together with his grandson Lot. Milcah, who was Nahor's wife, is also mentioned inasmuch as her descendants come into the history of God's ways later on (see chapters 24, 29-31).

But as we open chapter 12 a new fact of great importance is mentioned. This migration of Terah from Ur of the Chaldees, just mentioned, really took place at the instigation of Abram, to whom God had spoken, calling him to a life of separation from his old associations (see Acts 7:2-4). He was to cut his links with country, kindred, and even his father's house; that is, with his national, his social, and his domestic circles, in order to go to a land that God would indicate. The full significance of this will be better appreciated if, before going further, we read Joshua 24:2, then the opening of Stephen's address in Acts 7; and also Hebrews 11:8-10.

There is no mention of idolatry amongst the evils that filled the earth during the age before the Flood. By the time of Abram the post-Flood apostasy that started with Nimrod and Babel had developed. Idolatry was overspreading the peoples, and threatening to exclude the true knowledge of God. It had got amongst the descendants of Shem, and even Terah, if not Abram himself, had been infected by it. To preserve a testimony to Himself God called Abram clean out of the evil, to become a pilgrim and stranger in the earth. Mankind was already divided into nations under the divine government (Genesis 10:1ff; 11:9): it was now to witness a division of another kind: the separation of a godly seed from the mass of the ungodly.

This was a division produced by divine grace. To the men of Ur Abram's departure from their city with all its civilized amenities doubtless appeared as

foolish an act as Noah's construction of his ark on dry ground had doubtless appeared to the men of his day. Foolish indeed, but unimportant and soon to be forgotten. We now look back to Abraham's departure from Ur, nearly four thousand years after it happened, and realize it to have been an epoch-making event, one that established a principle of God's ways, the effect of which will abide to the end of time. From that moment God's work in the world has been based on the calling out of a people for Himself and separating them from the ungodly. From Abraham sprang the nation of Israel, who were separated under His government. Today the church is being called out and separated under His grace. In the coming age He will separate a people for millennial blessing by means of His judgment.

Verses 2 and 3 of chapter 12 show us that the man of faith, separated to God, obtains what the men of the world aim at and miss. The builders of Babel desired to make themselves a great name by concentrating their residence at Babel, and brought down upon themselves a curse. Their names have long been utterly obliterated. On the other hand, God made Abram's name great in his separation by faith; and through him all the families of the earth have been blessed (12:3). No name from those early ages has remained as great and famous as his. It is known and revered even today by millions – not only by Christians and Jews, but by Mohammedans also. The promises of these two verses have been amply fulfilled in the four thousand years since they were spoken, and supremely so by the coming of Christ.

Verses 4 and 5 declare that though Abram was detained at Haran until the death of Terah, he did ultimately reach the land to which God called him, taking with him his nephew Lot and all their possessions. The following verses show that, having reached it, God again appeared to him, and confirmed the promise of the land to his seed as well as to himself. In that early day the descendants of Canaan who had come under the curse of Noah (Genesis 9:25), were in possession of the land (12:6). Fully four hundred years had yet to pass before the curse would fall upon them by Israel taking forcible possession, and meanwhile Abram was a pilgrim in a tent. But he was in touch with God and built an altar to Him in the places of his sojourn (12:8, etc.). Nevertheless from that moment there can be no question as to those who are the rightful owners of that land (12:7). To Abram's seed it belongs today, though it will need an act of God to put them in possession in a lasting way,³ just as their ejections from it, both under Nebuchadnezzar and under the Romans, were acts of God.

From Scripture Truth 36 (1948-50), pp. 123-127; slightly edited.

³ This article first appeared about March, 1949, and the modern State of Israel was inaugurated the previous May.

“But I say to you”

Matthew 5:11-48 and its puzzles

Theo Balderston

The Lord spoke eight Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10), and He framed them impersonally (e.g., “Blessed are the poor in spirit”). The last of these promised reward for those who had acted righteously and suffered for it: they would be part of that kingdom in which righteousness will reign (Matthew 5:10; Isaiah 11:2ff).¹

But then the Lord added a ninth beatitude addressed personally to the disciples. “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kind of evil against you falsely for my sake” (5:11, NKJV). There is a particular “happiness” laid up for those who suffer for Jesus’ sake. The blessings of Israel were earthly, and connected with the grant and promise of “the Land”: no reader of the OT, and especially of Deuteronomy, can deny this. But there is a special intimacy of connection between Christ and those who have suffered for His sake, which means that their reward is not blessing in the place of God’s footstool, but rather in the place where His throne is (Isaiah 66:1). The Lord’s words in verse 12 may well imply that the persecuted prophets of the era then ending (see 11:12) will be there too (cp. Hebrews 11:32 – 12: 2). Heaven has already been glimpsed in the sixth Beatitude (5:8), and in the next chapter the Lord will hold up the heavenly inheritance as the prospect of all His disciples (6:19-21). But here He promises it especially to those who are maltreated for His name.

Then the Lord turns from pronouncement of future blessing to pronouncement of present fact. “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world” (5:13-16). He does not say they *should be* salt and light, but that they *are* it. A false disciple could, then, cease to be “salt”. This surely is what happened to Judas, who, when he fell, fell in a manner despicable to worldlings themselves. But there is also a warning to real believers: we must watch lest we in any degree “lose our savour”.

The world itself was what had to be “salted”, and the One for whose “benefit” this “salting” was needed must be God Himself. The disciples were to be salt in order to restrain the putrefaction of the world, and so hold back its judgment.

¹ Articles on the Beatitudes appeared in *Scripture Truth* in October 2018 and January 2019.

During the day of Christ’s earthly mission, He himself, the One in whom God was “well-pleased” (3:17), surely was that Salt, but the disciples were “salt” too.

Our “saltiness” is surely the purity of our lives and moral stance. It often happens that when a known Christian joins a group of worldlings, the topic of conversation changes. They stop running down that absent colleague, telling that dirty joke. This “saltiness” may extend to private rebuke of wrongdoers or wrong-sayers. Whether this “saltiness” should extend into political campaigning for right legislation is not something that could be derived from this passage, given the political powerlessness of those immediately addressed.

If “saltiness” is a Godward characteristic of rightly-walking believers, “light” is a manward characteristic. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (5:16). The word for “good” here is not the normal one, but one which could in this context be translated “noble”, or “praiseworthy”. If people know you are a Christian, then if they observe you doing fine, noble, praiseworthy acts, they will give God, not you, the praise for them. The “light” then, is the testimony we bear to God, to Christ, and to the gospel, without which unbelievers would only give *us* the credit for such acts. But, of course, if we are not *doing* such acts, there will be nothing for our testimony to shine *upon*, and cause unbelievers to give God the glory. Sometime in the 1930s the young daughter of one well-known servant of God arrived home and started telling her mother about a man she had seen singing for pennies while she was out. Her mother hastily silenced her, whispering that the very man was in the next room “having his tea”! It often happened that such visitors would disappear into the bathroom and reappear in one of the girl’s father’s older suits. There may be a rebuke for us all here. Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might... purify for Himself His own special people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).



Next comes a difficult passage. “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil” (5:17). What does the verb “fulfil” mean? Some interpret it to mean that the Lord in His own Person and life fully kept the Law; often restricting “the Law” in this verse to the so-called “moral” law because they imagine a difficulty in otherwise explaining how not one jot or tittle of the law will pass away till all be fulfilled (see next verse). But it is not possible to restrict “law” in verse 18 to the so-called “moral law”, since vv. 23-24 contemplate circumstances in which sacrifices were still being offered in the temple. And it is also not possible that the Lord considered any of the ten

commandments a mere “jot or tittle” – the smallest elements of the Hebrew script.

Some take “fulfil” merely to mean that the Lord’s life was a fulfilment of the OT prophecies. But this idea is ruled out by the fact that verses 19-20 consider the law as prescribing righteous conduct (as do vv.21-48).

Therefore v.17 must mean that the Law in its entirety – “moral”, “ceremonial”, and “civil” (as some classify it) will abide until *all* is fulfilled. In the millennium Israel will keep the Mosaic commandments perfectly (Deuteronomy 30:8); and the whole earth will come to Zion to learn it (Isaiah 2:3).² Ours is an exceptional era in the ways of God in this world, whereby we are the people of God, but people whom He views as dead and risen with Christ, so that “we are not under law” (Romans 7:1-4; Galatians 2:16-21).

But how about the “fulfil” of verse 17? W. Kelly

“[took] this word ‘fulfil’ in its largest sense. In His own person the Lord fulfilled the law and the prophets in His own ways [i.e., in His conduct, TB]... His life here below exhibited its beauty for the first time without flaw. His death was the most solemn sanction which the law ever could, or did, receive... But, besides, our Lord’s words warrant, I think, a further application. There is an expansion of the law, or *dikaiōma*,³ giving to its moral element the largest scope, so that all which was honouring to God in it should be brought out in its fullest power and extent... The Lord... gave it a spiritual application that man was entirely unprepared for before it came.”⁴

Those who limit “law” in Matthew 5:18 to the ten commandments have too low a view of what they call “the ceremonial law”. This very phrase demeans the law. The many Levitical regulations are not just so many visual aids to help the supposedly infantile minds of the Israelites to grasp the truth of atonement. True, they do furnish instructive “types” from which we can learn much (cp. Romans 15:4). But they exist because God will only have perfection, bodily as well as moral, in those who approach Him; and since a fallen people lack both, procedures must be instated to acknowledge the holiness of God. But when we approach God in this gospel day, He receives us as those who are dead and risen with Christ and made perfect in Him.

Verse 19 looks as if it relegates Paul, the writer of Galatians 5:2, to a “least” position in the kingdom of God: “Whoever ... teaches men so shall be called

² Perhaps the annual Day of Atonement will not resume – as having been fulfilled at the cross, but the Feast of Tabernacles will (Jeremiah 3:16; Zechariah 14:16).

³ I.e., the law’s righteous outcome or implications: an allusion to Romans 8:4.

⁴ W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew* (London, 1896 [1868]), pp.131-2.

least in the kingdom...” The verse therefore must be interpreted as not referring to the present gospel-day. Of course it applied to the disciples *as they were then*, still under Law. However, if the force of Matthew 5:19 and 23:2-3 ceased at the crucifixion, why are they recorded in Holy Scripture? Merely as a historical record? But 23:2-3, recording an instruction given just *before* the cross, only make sense as having force at some period *after* the cross. So there must be a people still to come to whom both 23:2-3 and 5:19 will again apply, a day when adherence to the whole Law will again be right, but also contentious. That is the day contemplated by Matthew 24:15, 20. However 5:19 also solemnly warns *us* never to speak derogatorily of any of God’s holy law.



Verse 20 should be read as a preface to vv. 21-48. Each of its sections (vv.21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) starts with, “You have heard that it was said...” or similar. We should firstly note what the Lord did *not* say: He did not commence v.21 by saying, “It is written in the law, ‘You shall not murder’”. The phrase, “You have heard”, surely directs attention to how the synagogue authorities expounded the law, and how they tended to limit its interpretation to the letter, at the expense of entering into the “spirit” of it. One primary purpose of the Law was certainly to provide rules for judges to base their verdicts on, and judicial verdicts must mainly focus on what has been *done*, paying only subsidiary regard to intention and motive. However the law was also given for personal meditation and action (see Deuteronomy 4:9; 5:29; Psalm 119:97, etc.). Some Jews of our Lord’s day made law-keeping a matter of the heart (Mark 12:32-33). But His teaching here suggests that, in the main, the rabbis made it a matter of observance of *deeds* only.

The Lord’s “I say to you” (vv. 22, 26, 28, 32, 34, 44) “fulfilled the law” (v.17) by expanding the law’s precepts to apply *equally* to what is only in our hearts. This searching teaching applies to us, too, in whom the righteous requirements [or, results] of the law are to be *fulfilled* (Romans 8:4). It should be impossible for us to come to the Lord’s table with contempt for a fellow-believer; indeed, for any person (Matthew 5:23ff). The fact that there is “no condemnation” (Romans 8:4) should not make us think that we can sin cheaply in this matter. The Spirit of God within us condemns such an attitude.

The same principle even more clearly applies in the case of lust (vv.27 -30). Given the virulence of this temptation, the most drastic measures should not be excluded for avoiding all that will arouse it. It is evident from Matthew 19:3ff that many Jews, including some of the “rigorist” Pharisees, entertained

low views of the marriage bond (and the low views of wives implicit in that). But the Lord rules out divorce on any grounds but one (5:31-32).

Breaking oaths was forbidden by the Law (vv.33-36), whereas breaking undertakings not confirmed by an oath was not a sin (Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23). If we have invoked God’s name in giving an undertaking, and circumstances prevent our discharging it, then God Himself is dishonoured by our failure. Hence the true “fulfilment” of these and similar injunctions of the law meant not taking oaths at all, but rather simply keeping one’s undertaking to the extent that this is in our power.

“Eye for eye”, etc. (5:38) was a judicial guideline for sentencing (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21), but it was evidently being used to sanction private settlement of grudges: not only did the Lord forbid this, but required the opposite.

Matthew 5:43-44 presents the most difficulty. The OT certainly instructed the individual to love his neighbour (Leviticus 19:18); but the corresponding “you shall hate your enemy” is not a quotation from the OT at all; it seems like a device for minimising the demands of neighbourly love. Exodus 23:4, Proverbs 24:17, and 25:21 prohibit personal vendettas. The LORD God Himself provides for all His creatures (Psalms 104, 148; cp. Matthew 5:45). On the other hand there are many retributory passages in the OT (e.g. Psalm 139:21-22; 140:9-11), and the forbidding self-revelation of the LORD at Sinai tells us that the Law was fundamentally judicial (Exodus 19; cp. Hebrews 12:18ff). But the Lord Jesus came in grace and not as Judge (Luke 12:14; John 12:47), and so He could “fulfil” Leviticus 19:18 by instructing his disciples to love their *enemies*. That divine regime of grace, in which God reconciles His enemies (Romans 5:10), has lasted till now.

The Lord’s concluding exhortation, “Be ye therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48), keenly condemns our failure to meet the chapter’s requirements, even though the indwelling Spirit makes us so much the more aware of sin within. The chapter therefore underlines that the absolute standards it requires are *never* going to gain us admission to the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore this passage cannot stand alone. It requires the gospel. Another righteousness must be found, and Romans 3:21-26 declares it. That passage may be outside Matthew, but Matthew cannot be understood without it.

Nonetheless, Matthew 5:21-48 remains indispensable guidance as to how the Christian life ought to be. We need to read it often, not neglect it.

God, Israel, Idolatry and Christ

A Brief Exposition of Isaiah 40 to 57

by **Hamilton Smith**

Published: 24 September 2018

Paperback: 80 pages; STP price: £4.75 + p&p

Written in 1941, but never before published in book form!

This volume consists of a verse-by-verse study of chapters 40 to 57 of the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah. Emphasis is placed on the dispensational approach to its interpretation, distinguishing prophecies as already fulfilled, or yet to be so. The focus of chapters 40 to 48 is seen as the issue of idolatry; and that of chapters 49 to 57 to be the coming of Jesus as the humble servant of God, to be followed by his future return to rule. Throughout the exposition valuable practical lessons are drawn for Christians today.

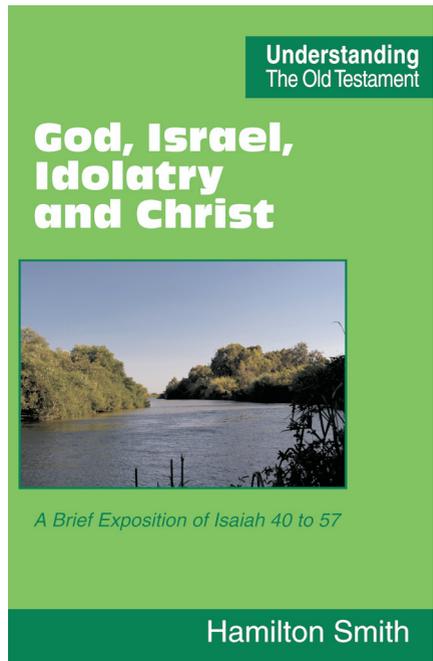
From the editor's foreword:

The year was 1941 and Hamilton Smith took up a consideration of the later chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah.

What light did the prophecy cast on the events taking place as he wrote? And what did the future hold? Europe was engulfed in war. Jews were suffering unprecedented persecution and they possessed no homeland.

Isaiah's message was a stern one: he conveyed the reasons for God's displeasure with Israel; and yet, beyond all the consequences of failure, the prospect of a regathered nation, safe in the homeland of God's provision, shone through, but only to be enjoyed when the Messiah comes to rule.

In preparing the text for publication some further scripture references have been added because not all today are as familiar with the Bible as Hamilton Smith's generation. The sources of general quotations have been identified where possible, and some contemporary anachronisms have been clarified for today's reader. Otherwise the text has not been changed.



“As for God...
... His way is perfect” (Psalm 18:30).

My times are in Your hands,
my God, I leave them there.
Why should I clutter up my life
with faithless, anxious care?
The future has not changed
however hard I fret.
Why spoil the joy of now
with what's not happened yet?

This verse is reproduced by kind permission of its author, Lily Gaynor, who was for many decades a missionary nurse in a west African country. She wrote it after she had managed to buy a VW Combi when on furlough, which would be invaluable for ferrying difficult maternity cases to the local hospital. She had intended it to accompany her on the sea-journey back to Africa, but, to her immense disappointment, the paperwork was not ready in time. However on the voyage they encountered a violent hurricane. Many cars and vans on board were damaged, some irreparably. How relieved she was that her Combi had not been ready for travel! It followed her on a subsequent sailing a few weeks later.

From Lily Gaynor and John Butterworth, *God's needle. How Lily Gaynor brought hope and healing to the land of the witchdoctors* (Oxford, Monarch, 2013), pp.137-9.